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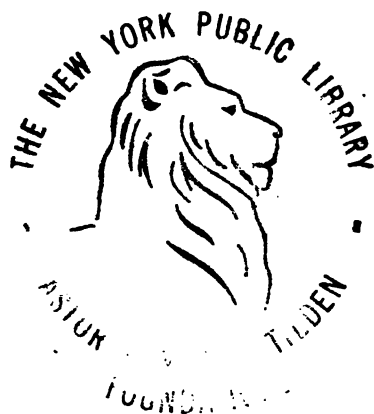
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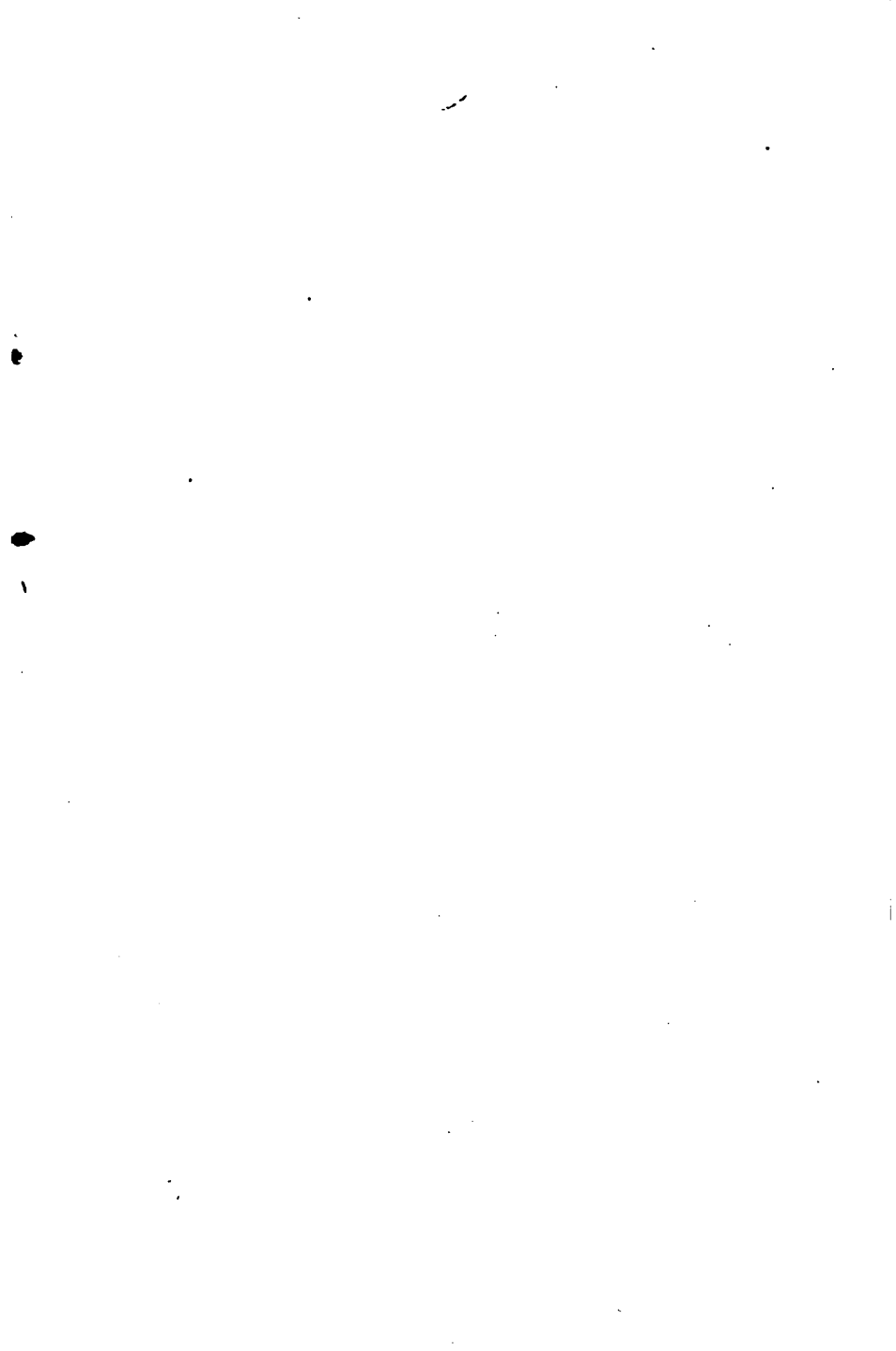


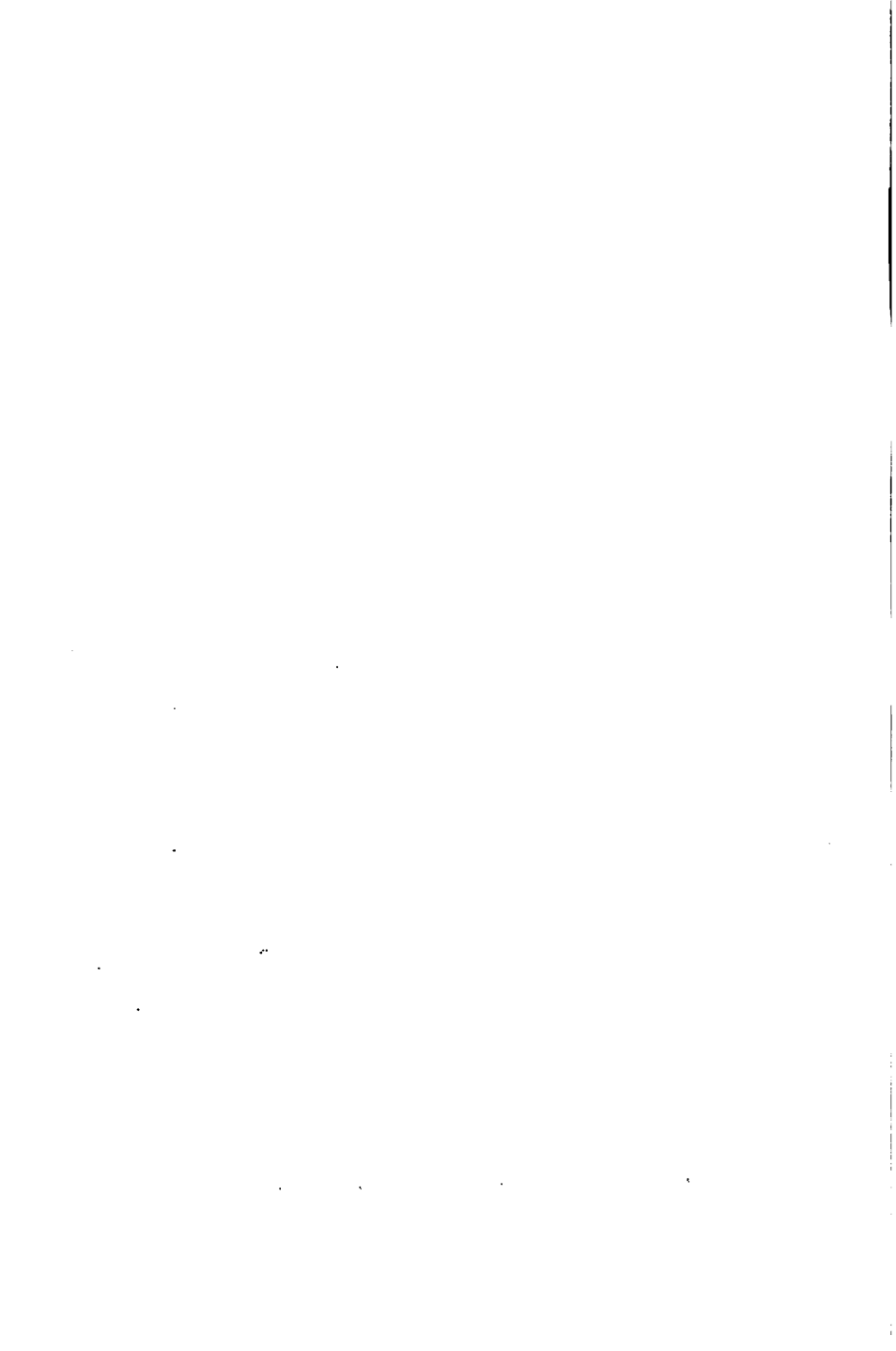


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McTodd



McTodd

BY

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'ADVENTURES OF CAPTAIN KETTLE,' 'MR. HORROCKS, PURSER,' 'THE FILIBUSTERS,'
'THE LOST CONTINENT,' 'THE LITTLE RED CAPTAIN,' 'THE RECIPE
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CHAPTER I

THE CHIEF OF THE *STARRY HEAD*

ONLY the skipper lived aft with Sir Rupert and the young ladies and the guests, and I don't think even he was quite comfortable there. He was a great man for yarns, to be sure ; and they always listened to him (so the steward told us) with marked attention ; but there was no getting over the fact that they were great people, and we were just common sailormen and engineers.

The two mates, the chief engineer and self, and the boatswain and carpenter, messed forward together, and had sleeping rooms opening off our cabin ; and I'll not say we were uncomfortable below deck. Of course the grub was good, because for a big fine yacht like the *Starry Head* they always have a cook who knows how to dress victuals, and not some bungling fool of a runaway gaol-bird who can only spoil them, like you meet on most small cargo steamers. Yes, I will say that : our cook on the *Starry Head* could boil tea and hash up a tin equal to the best eating-house in Greenock ; and if we did have a bit too much of

those patent antiscorbutic nastinesses, it was only what we had to expect when the owner was a member of Parliament, and professed to take an interest in 'sailors' wants.' Not that they mattered though ; we were none of us the cantankerous sort that makes trouble unnecessarily about such matters ; we used to just sling the stuff peaceably overboard, before it was put on the table, and fill up with honest salt horse and cheese. We'd as much cheese as we wanted on the *Starry Head*, with good flavoury Danish tinned butter too at every meal.

Of course it was a case of brass-edged clothes, and clean boiled shirts, and dancing-class civility for all of us when we were on deck ; and Chips, and the boatswain, and the mates, had to play that game right through whether they liked it or not. But a second engineer has no constant duty on deck, and I used to get to windward of it by staying below in my bunk when I'd a watch off. I did hear they gave me the by-name of ' the Sulky Scot ' before we were fairly clear of Southampton water, but a fat lot I cared about that.

Devine, the chief, was different. You could see Devine about on deck dressed up smart as a navy officer whenever he was off duty ; and he could do the polite like a young man brought up in a draper's shop. He was good-looking too : black hair, black eyes, clean shaved, with one of those whitish faces women like, that only carried just enough brown to make it wholesome. And it was plain that all the lot aft had taken a fancy to him ; one or other of them, especially the ladies,

was always walking the deck at his side ; and once he even had a chat with Sir Rupert himself about the Board of Trade examination for engineers. Devine said that sort of thing suited him. His father had been a barrister before he died ; and he was used to good society ; and finding it again was like a taste of old times. 'Well,' I thought, 'every one to his fancy. My father was Free Kirk minister at Ballindrochater, and that was as good as a barrister any day ; but I know my level, and am uncomfortable above it.'

Indeed it was only twice that I got let in for any talk with our swells before we brought up amongst the cods' heads and the other stinks in Vardø Harbour, at the entrance of the White Sea ; and each time it was Sir Rupert's eldest daughter, Miss Vasey, who tackled me.

Once it was when I had been set on by the Chief to repack the stuffing boxes of the windlass engines, and she came and leaned her back against the pin-rail and talked about machinery. She'd the poorest knowledge of it, and I'd great work not to let her see what a fool she was, which was a thing I didn't want, because let alone she was owner's daughter, it was plain too she was trying to be civil. I tried her with an account of the shops I'd worked in on shore, but that didn't do. It was marine engines she wanted to hear about, and the class of men who worked them, and what their prospects were ; and she listened to me with as pretty a show of interest as if I had been reading her a story out of the *Family Herald*. She didn't know the difference between the ash lift and

an oil can, but she took in every word I said, and if anything came along which she didn't understand, she'd just stop me and ask. It was quite a pleasure to give her information on such a sensible subject; she was not the sort that thought it necessary to laugh just because a man was talking; she quite understood that one was serious.

The other time when Miss Vasey got hold of me was when we were dropping our Lofoden pilot at that little town just in at the back of the North Cape. The Chief had sent me on deck to fit a new hinge to our starboard skylight in place of one that had been carried away, and this young lady came up and sat on the coaming whilst I worked, and started in to talk as familiar as you might yourself. It was twelve o'clock at night, and blazing daylight. There was snow on the bare hills down to the water's edge, but the air was warm. And there were some fishermen's boats alongside trying to sell us fine big cod at four for a shilling—a very nutritious diet at the cost. Sir Rupert and the rest were leaning over the port rail talking with the fishermen, so we two by the engine-room skylight were left alone. But when the rest had gone out of ear-shot, Miss Vasey put a question which fairly startled me. She wanted to know all about our Chief.

'Mr. McTodd,' says she, 'what sort of a man is Mr. Devine when he is ashore?'

Well, how was I to answer a question like that? I felt a sort of Red Sea temperature grow all over my body underneath my clothes, and my tongue

got sticking in my mouth, as though it hadn't had drink over it for a week.

'Come,' she said, 'tell me. You've been with him three voyages in different ships, so you ought to know.'

But I could only cough and say nothing. I was that flummoxed I couldn't get my screw-driver into the slots on the screw heads.

'Mr. McTodd,' says she, 'I think you're a very shy man. I dare bet a pair of gloves you will never have courage enough to ask any girl to marry you.'

'Indeed, Miss,' said I, 'you're wrong there. I was engaged once to a widow lady that kept a lodging-house in New Brighton: a most respectable person; and I'd be a married man this minute if I hadn't come in one night with a drop more whisky than she liked. I'll not deny, Miss, that whisky is my failing. It makes me talk too much. I have it about twice a year, after long voyages. It's the result of a fever I got in the Oil Rivers trade. Before that, I'd a head on me an archbishop might have been proud of. Nothing touched it.'

She nodded seriously. 'I've always heard that the Oil Rivers, and the Gold Coast, and down there, was a very unhealthy place, Mr. McTodd. But men are attracted there by the pay, so I've heard. Mr. Devine was down on the West Coast, once, wasn't he?'

'Yes,' said I, 'he was Chief on one of the Lagos branch boats.'

'Branch boats?' says she.

'You see, Miss, it's this way. Lagos is a big town on an island in a lagoon ; the bar is shallow ; and the ocean steamers have to anchor in the roads outside. The small branch steamers bring the stuff out to them across the bar and tranship it in surf boats ; or if the roll's too bad for that, the pair of them run down to the Forcados river and lay alongside and work cargo with their derricks.'

'I'm afraid you're talking a little over my head,' says she. 'I'm sorry I'm so stupid. But tell me, if Mr. Devine was chief engineer on one of those Lagos steamers, how came he to be third on a Cape boat afterwards?'

'Promotion.'

'What, promotion from chief to third?'

'Well, you see, those branch boats only carry one white engineer. I was boss of one myself once. A man doesn't need a chief's ticket for that, Miss.'

'I'm sure you was a very clever engineer, Mr. McTodd,' says she kindly, 'and if it wasn't for those nasty certificate regulations, you'd be chief of one of the big Atlantic steamers this minute. But tell me, how did Mr. Devine live when he was ashore at Lagos?'

'I'm sure I don't know, Miss. We were there at different times. But I did hear he didn't take to some of the Coast habits very handily. They said that till the day he came away he never once learned how to swizzle up a cocktail properly.'

'Ah, you knew him best ashore in England?'

'Not even in England. Once us engineers are

paid off from our ship, we mostly go our different ways.'

She tapped at the deck with her brown shoe. 'You seem determined to tell me nothing that I want to know, Mr. McTodd.' Then her cheeks reddened as though she had said more than she intended, and she put her head in the air and walked away. I went on at fitting my hinge, well contented. She was a pretty enough lassie, but she was several cuts above me, and that was a fact, and I felt more comfortable with her at a distance.

All this time Sir Rupert was haggling like an old wife with the fishermen, which was right enough, for I never hold with a man who flings away good silver over a bargain, however rich he may be, especially if a foreigner is to pouch it. And in the end he had nine big cod laid out on our white deck planks, for which he had paid two English shillings. But then what does he do but give each fellow in the boats another shilling apiece (and there must have been ten of them), just, as he said, for luck. Waste of that kind fair sickens me. Besides, it gives these foreigners a wrong impression of what we British really are. However, it was 'Get under way' after that, so I slipped below to bear a hand if the Chief should need it. We'd been tightening up the low-pressure eccentric band, and he was a bit anxious to see how she stood it.

As it turned out, everything ran smooth and cool as you could wish for, and when he'd given her the full steam, and we were not likely to hear

the telegraph again throughout the watch, I just mentioned to the Chief I'd been having a talk with our eldest young Miss.

'Well,' said he, wiping his hands on a lump of waste, 'what do you think of her?'

'Oh, she's a likely-looking lassie, though I cannot say I care for carrotty hair in a woman myself.'

'Auburn, you colour-blind bat.'

'Well, ye may call it fancy names, but I ken red when I see it. However, I'm no the man to say evil of the lassie. It's clear she's taken a fancy to me.'

'The devil she has,' said he, with a red face.

'She was talking to me as easy as I might to you,' said I, for I knew his fine ways, and was not going to give myself away to him.

'And what did she chat about? Scenery, and the sea, and the beauty of a sailor's life, and poetry generally? She's great on that.'

'She wanted to know about you,' I said, 'and when I got upon other matters, she always lugged the talk back to you.'

'Oh,' said the Chief, with a snap. 'Well, this is your own concern and Miss Vasey's, and I'll not ask you any more.' I noticed him looking over his shoulder, and I glanced that way too, and saw the fireman on watch knock off work, and lean on his shovel, listening. 'I don't think all of those thrust-blocks are working very sweetly. I'll trouble you to come aft with me into the shaft-tunnel, Mr. McTodd, and we'll give a bit of overhaul to the lubrication. We have smooth

water in here yet, and maybe we'll find it more than a bit lumpy when we're fairly out in the Arctic Sea.'

He lit a slush-lamp, crouched his shoulders, and led the way. I followed, slipping my hand along the shaft as I went. It was running smooth as milk, without a grunt or a grumble. As for the thrust-blocks, they were doing their work as sweet as a no-weight engine in an exhibition. But he led the way on past them right to the stern bearing, and leaned his back against the side of the tunnel, and coughed as though he wanted to speak and didn't quite know where to begin. He held the slush-lamp low, so that his face was in shadow above the smoky flame, and the fingers of his other hand kneaded the lump of waste which he carried till it got hard as a cricket ball.

'That *lignum vitæ* bush by the propeller——' I began, but he cut me short.

'Look here, Mac, old man, drop this cursed oily shop for a minute, and tell me what she said.'

'Who?'

'Evelyn—Miss Vasey, I mean, of course.'

'She wanted to know what sort of chap you were ashore.'

'And what did you tell her?'

'As little as I could.'

'Then I call it damned unfriendly of you, Mac. I've been a good shipmate to you, and you might have stood by me when the turn came.'

'And told her how you painted Grimsby red, and gave a gold ring with a green stone in it to that fat barmaid at Sunderland, and——'

'Rats ; you know what I mean well enough.'

'I give you my word I don't. How should I know what would interest a swell like her ? I thought that if I kept dark about your little games ashore I was doing well.'

'I haven't been more of a blackguard than any one else,' he said gruffly, 'so you needn't ram that Sunderland barmaid down my neck. Do you think I'm a filthy salt-water mechanic just because I like it ? Do you think I chum with women like that because I prefer them ? No blessed fear. I do it because I've no one else to talk to, and I kick myself all the time I'm being civil. If I'd had the sense of a dog, I'd have chosen a gentleman's trade when I left Harrow, and been able to hold up my head. As it was, I got reading rotten books, and thought the sea was a fine thing ; and here I am at thirty-two, head greaser on a successful man's toy boat.'

'I'm second on her, and I'm thirty-six,' I said. 'My father was a minister in the Free Kirk of Scotland, and I might have been another if I'd run straight. It seems there are a pair of us.'

'Mac,' he said, 'I'm a selfish brute, and I wasn't thinking of you just then, only of myself. Honestly, though, I don't see that you've got an opening just now, or I'd bear a hand to help you. Now I have.'

'What, is Sir Rupert going to get you a berth on one of the Western Ocean lines ? I know he's got influence in Liverpool.'

'Pouf,' he said, with a sudden glow, 'Sir Rupert

Vasey is out of the question. It's his daughter I'm speaking about. His eldest daughter.'

'Well?'

'Well, man, can't you see? Have you no eyes? She's in love with me, yes, in love from the crown of her head down to her pretty toes.'

'You're making a big mistake,' I said. 'Is it likely that a swell like her would look twice at one of her father's servants? She in love with you indeed!'

'But she is. I can see it in her eyes every time she looks at me. I can hear it in her voice every time she speaks. Do you think I've been up there with her staring at midnight suns half the night through for nothing? No, Mac, there's no blessed error about that. And as for birth, I'm as good bred as she is any day.'

'Still, man, you've no got the position.'

'That's the curse of it. But, Mac, I believe she'll take the jump and marry me. There's abundant time yet between now and the end of the cruise.'

'Whew!' I said, 'marry! Well, it would be a great thing for you. And are you in love with her too?'

'Oh, I like her well enough,' says the Chief, with a laugh, and he added, quietening down, 'I'd make her a rare good husband. Yes, there'd be no two ways about that. I should never forget the pit from which she had dragged me.'

'T'would be a fine thing for you,' I said.

'It would,' said he, 'and I believe I've got you to depend on for helping me into it, Mac. There's no one else on this yacht I've been shipmates with

before, and no one to speak a word for me except you. If she tackles you again about what I've been, pitch it to her strong; turn on the thunder and lightning a bit; and leave out all the things women don't like. I haven't had such a bad record at sea, Mac?'

'No,' I said thoughtfully; 'you've done your duty. There was that time the *Accra's* propeller blade came loose at San Thomé and you were diving down there for a day and a half all amongst the sharks, before you'd got the lock-nuts fast again; then you put in fifty hours with a ratchet drill when the *Paraguay's* shaft carried away in the Mexican Gulf; and it was a fine job you did when the old *Jumbo's* main steam pipe bust, and you went below and turned off the boiler cocks and got half cooked for your pains. There were four of them killed over that job, weren't there?'

'The whole watch was scalded to death. There were seven of them all-told, poor devils. It isn't a thing I can talk about myself, Mac, but you can for me. You pitch it to her strong, and don't be afraid of it. Lay it on in your best tuppence-coloured style. And, old man, if the thing comes off, you shall find me the most grateful friend you ever had in all this world. I'll get you a billet fat enough to surprise you.'

'Well,' I said, 'man, yon's a bargain,' and we shook hands over it. Eight bells went just then, and I went on watch feeling pretty satisfied. The marrying was the Chief's concern and the young Miss's, and if it came off I had no objection to being benefited. A man has to look after him-

self in this competitive world, and I did not want them to think at Ballindrochater that I had to stay all my life as a miserable understrapper on third-rate ships just because I couldn't pass the Board of Trade examination for a chief engineer's ticket. Besides, of course, there was mother to be provided for, and the better I could do that, the less I need kick myself for having an occasional fling at the whisky for personal diversion.

Now it was all very well for Devine to bid me blow the pipes cannily in his favour, but it was quite another thing to find opportunity for doing so. All the time whilst we were heading along that bleak northern coast, I stayed on deck whenever I was not asleep or on watch, and Miss Vasey did barely so much as look at me. Once when we passed a little Norwegian whaling steamer towing a couple of dead finner whales which they had killed, I thought I was going to have my chance. But the skipper came up to give explanations; he fairly bubbled with talk; he had been in the whaling trade himself for twenty years, and here was a text he could preach on as long as any one would listen. So I leaned my elbows on the starboard rail and stared till I was half blinded at the grim mountains on the shore, which carried the snow down to the sea's edge, with scarce so much as a patch of rock showing, and never a glimpse of greenery. Somehow I felt a companionship with those cold, uncared-for hills.

But in Vardö Harbour my chance came, and I made the most of it. The stink of the place was enough to knock you down. The cod fishing is

what the people live by, and they gut their fish by the harbour side and in the public street, and leave the innards to rot where they fall. Our eldest Miss could not stand it ashore at all ; she came on board again in the boat which took them off, and she stepped into the engine room and stood on the top platform and talked to me whilst I worked below.

‘I never knew what a pleasant scent warm oil could be before, Mr. McTodd,’ she says.

‘It beats a rose shop when once you get used to it,’ I said, and then asked her if she would like to look round now the yacht was quiet and cool. She said ‘yes,’ and I took her, and I think she was interested. Ours were really engines to be proud of—triple expansions, of course, with all the gear of the newest and cleverest ; and the Chief and I kept everything that bright and clean you could have eaten your dinner off the dirtiest part and not known there was a strange taste. Our pumps were a poem, no less. ‘Those engines, Miss, are like blood horses,’ I said ; ‘you’ve got to learn their ways and be their master, but once you’ve managed that, they’ll do most anything for you short of talking good Scots English.’

‘But will they never break down ?’ she asked.

‘If the guid God wills. But so far as good workmanship in the shops, and good looking after on board can ensure them, they’re just as safe as shares in the Dingwall and Skye Railway.’

‘I’m glad they’re safe,’ she says ; ‘I shouldn’t like an accident. It might be so terrible. Mr. Devine has been in more than one break-down, hasn’t he ?’

‘He has that, Miss,’ said I, ‘and he acted like a man when the need came.’ Here was my chance. I took a long breath and started off. There was no fear of being tedious with such a listener. She hung on my words, and when I told her about the Chief diving amongst those sharks in San Thomé Harbour, and how he turned off that steam when all his mates lay scalded, and all the rest of the yarns, I saw the pink and white come and go from her face like lime-light in a theatre. I don’t think my father ever preached so long at a spell in the Free Kirk pulpit at Ballindochater as I did in the *Starry Head’s* engine room that day, with the stinks of Vardø Harbour coming in acid whiffs through the ventilators. And, mind you, I told truth all through, for whatever else the Chief might be, he was a man all over when it came to a pinch. But I clinched the whole yarn with a lie big enough to please the devil.

‘You’ll not repeat to the Chief what I’ve said, Miss, will you? He’s my superior officer, you see, and he’d make matters very uncomfortable for me if he knew I’d been talking about his affairs.’

She agreed with me readily enough about that; indeed, she put out her hand, and took mine, and thanked me whilst she shook it for what I had told her. And then she went away into the deck-house, and I did not see her outside again till we had left the harbour and were steaming through the sweet keen air of the Varanger Fjord. But that was not till more than a week later. Sir Rupert had come

North to study the way in which these Vardø folks fed their cows on dried cods' heads, because he'd a notion it could be carried out in England, and would relieve agricultural distress. Of course it was all tomfoolery, but he was a member of Parliament, and had to do something to keep his place, and we on the yacht didn't grumble. We'd no objection to drawing our pay, with no heavy watches to keep, and shore leave granted whenever it was asked for.

For myself I did not trouble the shore much. I've no appetite for foreigners with their nasty ways, and I did not care to chuck my siller away, and then come back on board with more whisky under hatches than was quite good for me. In fact, the only time I went off was when the Chief took me. He said he wanted a talk.

We went out through the main street of the town, past Laplanders and Norwegians, and Finns in high boots with turned-up toes, and lowsy Russian fishermen with hair on their shoulders, and the dirt fair peeling from them.

'My God!' said the Chief, 'fancy living in such a place all the year round, half of it when there's no night like we have now, and t'other half all darkness. Fancy always breathing up these stinks. Fancy marrying even the pick of the women. Ugh, aren't they brutes?'

'Every one to his taste,' I said. 'They're women you could leave in safety when you went away to sea. No one would run away with them.'

He laughed. I'm sure I don't know why; but he did laugh.

'You're a funny dog at times, Mac,' he said, 'though I don't think you know it. Well, you're right in a way, but I don't hanker about going to sea continually all the rest of my days. What did you say to that girl yesterday?'

I told him.

'And you didn't let her know I'd set you on?'

'Man, I'm no quite a fool.'

'You're far from that. Well, Mac, I'm your debtor, and if I bring it off, you shall find that I can pay what I owe.'

'Then it's no a settled thing yet?'

'It's not. It's the thought of what Sir Rupert will say that's keeping her hanging in the wind. But there's time enough yet; the cruise is far from its end, and you'll see me engaged to that girl before you smell Southampton mud.'

'You've plenty of confidence in yourself,' I said.

'I have that,' says he. 'I'm going nap on this hand. I'm either going to win or bust.'

'You're talking above my head.'

'Perhaps you'll understand it better later.'

'And you don't feel shame,' I said, 'picking up this rich girl just to live on her?'

'Mr. McTodd,' he says hotly, 'you're my subordinate officer, and you're insolent. If you don't stop that talk I'll break your blasted head. By Moses, if you want to fight, come up a back street and put up your hands, or else don't speak again like that to me.'

'You needn't make a fuss,' I said; 'I meant no harm. I thought I was merely repeating your

own ideas upon the matter. I don't think I quite understand your way of looking at the business.'

'I don't think I understand it myself,' he said sourly. 'Which way are you going, Mr. McTodd?'

'Straight on.'

'Then I'm going straight back. I don't want your company any more just now, Mr. McTodd. I believe I've told you too much.'

'Weel,' I thought, 'the Chief's a strange man at times,' and I took a plug of slop-chest tobacco from my pocket, and shredded up a pipe-load. I watched him stride away amongst the cods' bones which strewed the street, but he did not go down to the yacht's boat. He turned off instead towards the other side, where the naked rocks of the island back in upon the wooden town; and he passed through the great alleys of wooden racks, where the split cod hangs up to stink or dry as the weather chooses; and he went on to the peat and the hummocks beyond, where the breeze comes in sharp and clean from the Arctic, and the sea-fowl scream amongst the crags. He got lost there to my view, nor did I see him again till twenty hours later, which was his next appearance on the yacht. A small rain had been falling all of the time, and he was wet and chilled to the bone. His face was white and drawn, with black rings around the eye-sockets, but there was a grim look on his mouth which let me know he had not changed about going on with his scheme. Well, if he married our eldest young Miss, it was his concern and not mine. There's no man that likes siller better than

me. But for all the siller in the world I'd not invite misery by marrying a swell like her, no, not even if she loved me, like it was clear our eldest Miss did the Chief.

Archangel was to have been our furthest port, but it seems Sir Rupert got so sweet on his cods' head fodder for cows, that he wanted to see every variation of it before he took the idea home to lay before the House of Commons. So we made steam, unmoored, and put her across the Varanger to a bit of a narrow inlet called Jar Fjord on the southern side. But a lot of things were to happen before we got there.

The watch changed at midnight, when we were halfway over, but instead of going below when the Chief relieved me, I strolled forward, got under a lee, and stared ahead. There was a cold, glaring sun high in the sky, and a wind blowing raw out of the north. In front of us was a great wall of mountains glittering with snow where they showed through the clouds, and white right down to where they grew out of the water. On the sea through which we passed were a few boats of fisher Laps, riding dry over the short, steep combers.

I must have kept my eyes on these for well-nigh an hour, instead of turning in like a senseful man to gather my whack of sleep, when of a sudden there was a ringing *crack*, as though some one had fired a brass gun close handy, and afterwards there came a roar which there was no mistaking. I take credit to myself that by the time I had turned my head, my feet had already broken into a run aft. Something had burst, I didn't know what ;

the steam was coming in a grey, noisy cloud out of the engine room, and before anything else was done it had got to be turned off from the boilers. That was the one thing I had got in my mind as I rushed aft, and I was going to do it if I got killed for my pains ; afterwards I could see to the Chief and the fireman on watch.

But who should I meet coming out of the hot cloud beside me as I got a foot on the engine-room ladder, but the Chief himself, with a face savage as a devil's. It appeared he'd been sitting on the skylight with the eldest Miss when the explosion happened below, and he'd seen her aft first before he came to do his work.

'Get you to hell out of that,' he shouted, when he saw me move to go below. 'It's my job.'

'Very well, I'll relieve you,' I said.

'By God,' he cried, 'if you won't listen to words, take that,' and he upped with his fist and sent me flying. I saw him pull his coat over his head, and step on to the ladder, and then the blinding, roaring steam hid him from my view.

Well, you see, then I stayed where I was, because really it was his watch, and, besides, he'd gone, and there was no use a pair of us having the meat cooked from our bones over a one man job. Twenty seconds later the roar of steam stopped, so that meant he'd got it turned off. But in twenty seconds a man can get scalded to death seven times over with high-pressure boilers like ours, so I wasn't altogether sweet on his chances. However, I waited a wee for the muck of steam to clear a trifle, and was just going down,

when who should come up but the stoker, that I had thought on watch below.

‘Hullo, my son,’ said I, ‘you’ve saved your bacon anyway. Where have you been off to?’

‘The Chief sent me for a ball of marline from the bo’s’n’s stores in the forepeak, sir.’

‘Well, then, you can come below with me and give it him,’ and I got on the ladder and led the way. The place was still pretty blinding, and it took us a minute before we found our man. But once we had him lifted between us it wasn’t long before we got him out on deck. The coat had saved his face, but his hands were very badly scalded, and probably other parts of him as well. But I wasn’t wanted there; he had plenty of others to look after him; and the eldest Miss showed clearly enough who was going to be head nurse. So I just said to her, ‘Wrap him up as quick as you can so as to keep the air away, and put on lime-water and oil, if there’s any in the medicine chest,’ and then off I went again to the engine room.

The steam down there had cleared by that, and was blowing off noisily through the escape. So I let it have a bit more play there, to ease the pressure on the boilers, and set to look for the break.

It was not hard to find. One of the copper steam pipes had split for a foot all down the brazing, and with the tackle and available crew we had on board it would take us three solid days to replace it. So I went on deck with my report, and found the Old Man getting her under canvas already.

‘You can’t give us the steam anyway?’ said he.

‘No, sir.’

‘Well, we can’t get back to Vardø without it, and as I’ve a fair wind for the Jar Fjord, I shall go in there just as we intended. Sure you can tinker her up here yourself, Mr. McTodd?’

‘Just as well as they could at Clyde Bank, Captain. Besides, there are no shops at Vardø worth mentioning. How’s the Chief, sir?’

‘Badly scalded about the hands and arms; but he’s got off a lot easier than might have been expected. I’ve had him carried to his bunk, and Miss Vasey is down there dressing his burns. Pity we’ve no whale oil on board. There’s nothing like it for bad scalds, once you get over the smell.’

The chain of snow mountains opened as we closed with them, and let us through into a narrow fjord. The *Starry Head* was a regular fool under canvas; but we’d a soldier’s wind, and her two small try-sails and the jib gave us a bit more than steerage way, which was all that was wanted. We weren’t exactly making passages just then. The snow left us as we sauntered on, and the banks of the fjord grew green with moss, and then with grass; and then we passed the tree-line, and could look out upon forests of scrub birches, many of them as much as three feet high. The mosquitoes came also, which most of us could have done without comfortably.

The mosquitoes it was which drove us away at the end of a week’s stay. There was a whale factory, with a couple of half-fledged finners on

the beach before it, which interested Sir Rupert very much, because he found that round there they fed their cows on whale beef as well as cods' heads, and he wanted to include all details of that in his report. But the young ladies and the other guests aft could not stand those pestilential mosquitoes at any price, and there was something like a mutiny amongst them, till Sir Rupert consented to compromise matters by putting back to Vardö.

But during that week a good deal had happened. I didn't see the Chief much for the first three days, because Chips and I were hard at work repairing damages; but when things were fixed up again I used to sit by him most of the time when the eldest Miss was not there. And I learned a curious thing. He had gone and fallen in love with her himself.

Well, any one would think that was rather a good move. But that was not his way of looking at it. He did nothing but moan about 'dragging her down to his level,' and 'spoiling her life out of selfishness,' and sludge of that kind. But I judged him to be a bit off his head, and only just said 'Oh' and 'ah' and 'weel man, I suppose you'll be right,' just by way of politeness. It was not till we were back amongst the stinks of Vardö Harbour that the Chief and I had our final flare up.

I'd come down the companion rather suddenly, and heard our eldest Miss calling him Archie, and him calling her Evelyn, though when she saw me she ran away with a face like fire.

‘I’m sorry to have disturbed,’ I said, when she’d gone. ‘But I suppose I ought to congratulate? Ye’ll have fixed it up?’

‘That’s as may be.’

‘Weel, man, it’s fine to be provided for all the rest of your days.’

‘You’d better have a care what you say.’

‘Dinna fly at me, Mr. Erchie. I’m trying to be ceevil.’

‘You damned Scotchman,’ he cried, ‘you naturally think I was after her for her money.’

‘Well, and weren’t ye?’

He looked at me with tight lips and an ugly eye. At last he spoke. ‘Mr. McTodd,’ he said, ‘you shall have the whole history of the business. Miss Vasey took a fancy for me from the moment I came on board. I saw it, and I made it grow. I cared not one brass farthing for her, but I wanted a rich wife who could lift me up out of this hateful life. So I lured her on till she loved me; you saw how; you helped. I was going to propose to her when I saw the time was fitting, and not before. I liked her then, but nothing more.

‘That day I had a talk with you in Vardø street it came upon me that I loved her, and I quarrelled with you because you had brought the knowledge to me. I went off into the hills and argued with myself alone in the cold and the rain. I compromised with my conscience; I said, “I will not propose to her, but if she asks me herself, then I will marry her.” When I got back to the yacht she was cold to me. I got frightened that the game was up, and I feared I should lose her.

My God, Mac, you can't know how I loved her.

'So I prepared that accident. I weakened that copper steam pipe along the brazing with a file, sent the fireman forrard on an errand that would keep him, and then half closed the throttle, so as to send up the pressure. I went on deck, and as luck would have it was talking to Evelyn when the explosion came. All the rest you know for yourself.'

'There were the file marks showing on the copper,' I said drily. 'You're no a very neat mechanic, Mr. Devine.'

'And will they see it? Have you told any one? Where is the piping now? Speak, man?'

'I had an accident whilst I was washing it, and the piping tumbled overboard. It's a pity.'

'Mac, you're a good soul.'

'Then she has asked you to marry her?'

He nodded drearily.

'And ye're going to do it?'

He raised himself on an elbow and swung his legs out of the bunk. 'Help me on with my clothes,' he said, 'and in two hours' time I'll show you what I'm going to do. I must go ashore.'

'Ye're no fit for the shore,' I said.

'I'm best judge of that, Mac. Now dress me quick, and don't mind about hurting. A little pain more or less won't matter just now.'

I let him have his way. I dressed him as gingerly as I could, and he stood up once more in his uniform clothes, with two bandaged hands hanging helpless from his sleeves.

‘Now put money in my jacket pocket. You’ll find it in the drawer of my chest.’

I did that.

‘No, all of the money.’

I put in the rest.

‘Now go and see if the deck’s clear, and as soon as there’s no one about, get a boat alongside and give me a cast ashore.’

I did that for him also, thinking it best to let him have his own way, and at the shore steps he bade me go back to the *Starry Head*. ‘You’re a good sort, Mac, and I’ve a lot to thank you for. A pity, isn’t it, I didn’t marry that fat barmaid at Sunderland?’

‘You could have her, man, I daresay, if you went back. She’ll not have forgotten that fine ring ye gave her with the green stone in it.’

‘All right, Mac, I’ll remember. You are a bit Scotch, you know. Good-bye.’ And he walked up the steps, and I sculled the dinghy back to the yacht.

I stayed on board that day because I’ve a theory that if a grown man has trouble, it’s best for him to see it through alone. But I didn’t know the extent of the Chief’s. The Old Man came on board brimming with it.

‘Mr. McTodd,’ says he, ‘come here. You’re to be chief engineer for the run home, and be hanged to you. D’ye think you’re capable of the work?’

‘Me Chief?’ Oh, I’m capable enough; no one more so. But me Chief, Captain. What’s become of Mr. Devine?’

‘Oh, he’s gone off his onion, I think. He was on a bench in the street there, outside a drink shop, with a Lapland woman or some such filthy cattle of that kind on either side of him, roaring drunk. He’d his blessed bandaged arms round their waists, and they were kissing him in turns. He’d been standing free brandy to any of those Noah’s Ark ruffians who’d drink it, and most of them were roaring drunk also. He’d insulted a customs house officer, and the commandant of the fort, and the Russian Consul, and when we came along to try to quieten him he insulted us also. He told the gov’nor that cods’ heads would never carry him into the House of Lords, and recommended him to try a Lapland woman as a second wife. The rum part of it was,’ says the skipper, with a frown, ‘the fellow wasn’t drunk or near it. He was cold staring sober, and that made the thing all the worse. The gov’nor would have forgiven him, but Miss Vasey says “No.” She says that either Devine leaves the ship or she does, and after that, of course, there was nothing else for it but to go and see the Consul and get the fool dismissed. I congratulate you on climbing into the berth, Mac, but I wish you’d got it in any other way.’

Well, of all the miserable ships after that, commend me to the *Starry Head*. It seemed as though all the life had gone out of her. Everybody was quarrelling; the coal we got wouldn’t make good steam; and the Swede they signed on as second engineer was the biggest gumph that ever handled a spanner. I scarce ever dared leave

him with the engines alone, and as for being on deck, it was a thing not to be thought of. When I was off watch I was sleeping like a tired dog. So it happened that I didn't see the eldest Miss till we were round the Forelands, and were leaving Dover behind us on the run to home. I tell you the change in her was enough to make me want to cry.

'I haven't congratulated you on your promotion, Mr. McTodd,' says she.

'I'm standing in the shoes of a better man,' says I.

'Of a very foolish man,' says she, 'of whom I do not wish to hear more.'

'Of a very big-hearted man, if you'll excuse me, Miss,' says I, and then, before she could get away, I reeled out the yarn of everything that had happened just as Archie Devine had told it to me. 'I'm afraid,' I said, 'I've taken a very great liberty, Miss. But I thought it right that you should know.'

She took my hand in both hers, and pressed it, and smiled up at me. 'You have taken a very great liberty, Mr. McTodd. You have made me alter all my plans.'

'I'm afraid, Miss,' I said, 'I do not quite understand.'

'I was intending to go back to London some five minutes ago, Mr. McTodd. But now I think I shall run up to Vardö again.'

CHAPTER II

THE PIRATING OF THE *SHAH*

Now I'll not deny I guessed there was something fishy about the *Shah* from the very first minute her skipper talked to me ; but I was not in a position to pick and choose. In fact I was that pushed, it was a choice between taking the berth I was offered, or going to sea as ordinary fireman at four pound a month.

It was my weakness that had got the better of me as usual. I had come into New Orleans on one of the West Indian Pacific boats, and the berth was good. I was third on her, and though I ought to have been second, the berth as third was distinctly good. We engineers had a mess-room, with a steward all to ourselves, and bread was baked on board fresh three times a week. There was no stint of anything ; even pickles were to be had for sticking out your fork ; and any one but a fool would have stayed on that ship and read up text-books, and won promotion. I was a fool.

He was a very nice, quiet, gentlemanly fellow, the one who got me to go ashore with him, and he could play hymn-tunes on the accordion like

an organ in a chapel. I did see him laughing and joking with some of the others, but then, as he explained to me, a boarding-house master has to suit himself to his guests. He admitted he wasn't Scotch himself, but his mother had come from Kilmarnock as a girl, and he'd a strong liking for the North country in consequence. He wasn't wanting me to go and stay in his house, he explained to me, but only to come and have a cup of tea just for the sake of the place I came from. It was not to cost me a single sixpence. It seemed he was a member of the Free Kirk of Scotland himself, and that explained it. My father had once been minister to that sect at Ballindrochater.

We had a bit of a social after tea, and there was hymn-singing to the accordion, and I sang too. They seemed to like it, and they drank my health. I just had a tot to drink theirs back. There was corn whisky in a demi-john on the table, and you could help yourself, with nothing to pay. It would have looked unfriendly not to taste.

Well, I'll admit that night was a bit thick when it got to the finish, and where I slept the guid Lord may know, but I don't. I'd a thirst on me like Welsh coal ashes next morning, and the whisky was still there, and by mid-day I was full up to the eyes again, and inclined to talk. I went back to the ship, found the Old Man on the levee cursing some nigger roustabouts, and forthwith told him what I thought of his conduct. I wasn't content with telling him quietly either ;

I must needs mount on a cotton bale and preach aloud to all the niggers and loafers who would hear, that any skipper who could use language like that was no sort of company for God-fearing men like us ; and, finally, whilst I was advising them to duck him in the Mississippi, a policeman came up and lugged me off to the calaboose. There was no foolery about that policeman. He drove me before him with the small end of a revolver, and I had to go. Police are valuable in New Orleans, and drunks are not. They don't allow their police to go scrapping with madmen in the public streets, and if a drunk won't come when he's told, he's shot, and there's a good riddance of him.

Well, of course, I was sacked from the West Indian Pacific after that ; the British Consul wouldn't look at me ; and after the boarding-house master had mopped up my pay, and what he lent on my chest, he showed me the door too. He wouldn't keep me on in hopes of getting his dollars out of my next advance. He said straight he didn't think I'd get another ship. He said my tongue, when I got it oiled, was enough to frighten Grover Cleveland.

I'd two dollars left when I got shown the door there, and with two dollars a man doesn't starve all at once in New Orleans. There are free lunch counters everywhere, and with a ten-cent glass of beer you can have a very tolerable fill out of fish-pie, dry hash, cheese, and so on ; but it doesn't do to go to the same place too often, or the nigger behind the bar will forget to fill your plate

when you pass it on. But two dollars won't last long, and when I'd got down to my last quarter, and this berth on the *Shah* turned up, I'd just got to take it and hold my tongue.

It was her skipper himself that lured me into it. He was a smallish chap called Blake, American-Irish I think, and the biggest thief in the two Atlantics. He'd a face on him like a saint in a stained-glass window, and a reputation that would have spoiled a gallows. But he could talk polite fit to make an actor of.

So far no gaol had ever claimed him, because he had always kept to windward of the law, or hadn't been caught; but he was considered a baddish tough even in New Orleans, and goodness knows they're not particular down there. He came across me sitting on a cotton bale on the levee at the foot of Canal Street. He had just come down river in a big stern-wheeler, and I was the first person he spoke to after he walked down her gang-plank.

'You're Mr. Sandy McTodd, aint you?'

'Neil Angus McTodd.'

'Same thing. Still out of a berth, sonny?'

'I haven't decided yet which to take.'

'Then take mine, or I reckon you'll starve.'

'Is that stern-wheeler yours, Captain?'

'No, siree. I'm Captain Blake of the *Shah*. She's down river at anchor by the quarantine station, waiting orders. And I want a new second engineer. My last skipped. If you think you'd like the berth, come and liquor.'

'Right-O,' said I, and I walked with him down

Canal Street, and we turned off and went into a saloon. It was on the French side, and I'd seen more respectable places. We went into an upstairs room, and a nigger brought us two schooners of beer; and when he had gone we were alone, excepting for the flies, who wouldn't repeat what they heard.

'Now,' said the Captain, 'let's get to business. Item the first, you're stone broke?'

'I'm no John Rockefeller just for the minute,' I said.

'And you'd like to earn treble wages, even with hard work?'

'I'm with you there all the way.'

'And could be content to ask no questions?'

'About what, Captain?'

'*Carrajo!* There you are, beginning already. You've got to ask no questions whatever, my son, if you come aboard of me, and you're to see nothing you're not intended to see. I can get the ordinary type of inquisitive idiot cheap anywhere. My last second engineer was that brand, and I had no use for him. So I just fired him. You can bet I'm not offering big pay for nothing. No, siree. I want a man who can keep his head shut.'

'I'm that way, Captain, if the pay's big enough.'

'Sufficient "siller" will make you concentrate your thoughts on that and not see anything else? I quite see your idea. Well, Mr. McTodd, there's twelve pound a month for you so long as you're second engineer, and thirty when you're chief.'

'Me chief!'

‘That’s what I said.’

‘Will you tell me, is there any chance of that happening?’

‘Every chance : with decent luck you ought to be chief engineer of the *Shah* by this day week.’

‘But how——’

He cut me short with a laugh. ‘I’m not going to talk,’ he said. ‘Here’s the offer ready packed up and waiting for you : take it or don’t.’

‘I’m coming with you, Captain.’

‘Very well. We’ll go round right now and get you signed on, and then we’ll be off to the ship. There’s a tender running down to the quarantine station in half-an-hour from this. You don’t want any advance, or you might be tempted to go on the spree again. You can fill up your kit from the slop-chest when we get on board. The *Shah*’s got a fine slop-chest.’

‘How do you know I’ve no kit, Captain?’

He laughed pleasantly. ‘Never you mind how. But you can take it from me I do know. I know all about you : yes, sree, every blooming thing, or the pair of us wouldn’t be talking here now. And I say also, you’ll find me a good ship-mate. Finish up your beer, Mac, and let’s be going : here’s good luck to you.’

We got down to the *Shah* that afternoon, and I must say she was a vessel that pleased the eye. She was a fine new ship, built and engined on the Clyde, and owned by a Liverpool firm. She was some fifteen hundred tons’ burden. Her last skipper had died of Yellow Jack in Pensacola, Florida ; Mr. Knowles, the mate, had brought her

across to New Orleans ; and Captain Blake had been engaged by cable from England. He had to sail in two days from getting the billet, and he certainly made good use of his time, for in those two days he not only planned how to run away with the *Shah* as she stood, but had also got together the men who were necessary to help him. But about that, of course, I did not know till later.

Steam was ordered for daybreak, and so I was pretty full up till then finding my way about, and getting the hang of the machines. The Chief was a nervous man, and he seemed to have a small opinion of my capabilities. I wondered much what he would think if he got to know I was to step into his shoes. Of course, though, I said nothing about that, but just followed him round, and listened with a puckered face whilst he gave me tips about his engines. Whilst they were getting up steam he even thought good to blow off a test-can full of water and show me how to use litmus paper on it !

At daybreak punctually enough we got under weigh, with a Port Edes pilot on the bridge to take us out through the South-East Pass. I was free after the watch was set, and went out on deck for a whiff of air. The river was smeared with a three-foot layer of white mist ; you could barely see the yellow water as it scrubbed along the steamer's side ; and the trees on the shores were cut off clean by the whiteness half-way up their trunks. There was a smell to the mist like new-turned earth ; it was just the smell you get up the

Congo and the West African rivers; and it as good as said to me, 'My lad, you take precautions or you'll have a dose of fever coming back to you.' So I went below to rout up the cabin steward to get a dose of quinine out of the medicine chest, when who should come in there but the Old Man himself.

'Quinine?' said he. Certainly, Mac, my lad. Wade in and help yourself. 'Say, you'd better take a couple of Cody's pills to ram it home.'

'Cody's?' said I. 'They're new to me.'

'Best pill that was ever rolled,' said he. 'Your English pills make me tired. I guess a man might as well swallow shot-corns for all the good they do. Now Cody's are regular twisters; it doesn't matter what a man has the matter with him, Cody's get right there, and let him know they're attending to business. Are you interested in drugs, Mac?'

'No man more so. I've been in the West Coast trade, Captain, and drugs just kept me alive. I fair lived on them, and no expense spared.'

'Sit down right here,' said he, 'and put that cigar in your face. We must have more talk about this. I need a great deal of drugs myself, and what I don't know about them isn't worth knowing. Bear a hand and we'll pull out the medicine chest and go through it right now.'

Well, I have got to tell a good deal against Captain Blake later on, but I will say here that for a man who was splendidly informed with regard to medicine, I never met his equal. It seems he always read carefully through all the papers which

his bottles and pill boxes were wrapped in, and that's a thing many people omit, and besides he'd a book on doctoring that he knew better by heart than he did his *Norie's Epitome*. He showed himself quite the gentleman, too, in the way he left the *Shah's* medicine chest to my discretion. 'Wade in,' he said, 'and help yourself, Mac. I'd not give that leave to everybody, but you're a man that knows what he's about, equal to a doctor in a hospital ashore.'

It was while we were having this talk that the propeller stopped. He gave me a curious look, and 'I reckon,' said he, 'that means we're on the ground.' But he didn't offer to move from his seat.

'Well,' thought I, 'the ebb's making fast, and if we don't get off quick, here we'll stay for another tide.' But as it was not my place to say anything I held my tongue.

'Dangerous things, these Mississippi bars,' said he. 'Very likely to get some plates started over this game.'

'Oh no,' said I, 'there's no danger. It's all soft mud underneath. Why, we never felt her going on. There was no shock whatever.'

He leaned across and whispered in my ear, 'But I say there is danger, Mr. McTodd. I tell you that this ship's bottom has very likely received such damage here that it is quite on the cards she may sink when she gets into the sea-way outside. If you let news of that slip out amongst your grubby crowd in the stoke hold I shall be your debtor. Now, sonny, don't stop to think: go right now and do your bid.'

I said 'Aye, aye, sir,' by force of instinct, and went away below. The third engineer was standing by the reversing gear, and asked me what was amiss. I told him we were on the ground, and said I'd a fear we might have some of our bottom plates started. He cackled at me with laughter, and I felt my face grow red. 'Why, what a blessed scary Scotchman you must be!' said he. 'She took the ground like butter going on to a bar of soap. It wouldn't have cracked the glass in a greenhouse.'

'There are snags in this Mississippi mud,' I said. 'We're down in the pass now. If you go on deck and look over the banks, you'll see the sand outside in the Gulf regularly sown with tree-trunks. They're as dangerous to a ship's bottom as coral rock.'

'McTodd,' said he, 'get away to your bunk and sleep it off. Your nerves are a bit joggled up still.' And off I went, feeling pretty foolish. But I had noticed one of the firemen listening to our talk, and judged that I had done what the Old Man intended.

We did not get off that tide, or the next, but stayed there stewing in the heat and gnawed at by the mosquitoes, whilst the engines ran ahead and astern in half-hour spells alternately, and the Captain on the bridge talked to the pilot for trying to rip the bottom out of her. Indeed, when we did get off the bar at last and slowed down off the lighthouse on the Fort Edes spit to drop the pilot into his boat, I thought then that he must have been glad to see the last of us. But I have

guessed since that the fellow must have been paid to let us ground on that bar so as to pave the way for what was to happen afterwards.

Only one other conversation did I have with Captain Blake before the *Shah* was pirated, and that was the afternoon we were off Key West. I met him, as it were by accident, in the port alley-way, and he asked me to come along to the chart-house and see if I could find out what was wrong with his hanging lamp. 'The carpenter has tried his hand,' said he, 'and made no sort of a job of it at all, and I guess my room stinks of kerosine like a Pittsburg tool shop. But you're a man of ideas, McTodd, and you'll see what's wrong at a glance.'

'I can no smell oil just the now, Captain,' said I, when we got inside the chart-house, 'but if you'll just let me handle the lamp a minute or so——'

'Shucks,' he says, 'let the lamp alone. That was only a blind, because I didn't care to say below what I wanted you for, in case somebody was listening. Sit down on the sofa, Mac, and fill your pipe. What do you think of the chief engineer?'

'It's no for me to speak evil of my superiors, but—I'd call him a very careful officer.'

'He's an old woman, a nervous old woman, that's what the Chief is. And he's no idea which side of his bread's margerined. Now I guess you have, Mac. There are no flies on you—and—I believe you could keep your head shut if a secret was told you?'

'That depends.'

‘Oh,’ said the Old Man, ‘if you can’t give me a promise I can hold my tongue.’

‘Well,’ I said, ‘I’m pinning myself to nothing, ye’ll understand, but I’ll not repeat any matter you choose to speak upon.’

‘That’s good enough for me,’ says the skipper, and he started in to reel out a tale which made the hair tickle on the top of my scalp. He was not very long about it either ; he told me his scheme in forty words ; and then he asked my opinion upon it.

‘Man,’ I said, ‘it’s piracy, no less.’

‘Oh,’ he says, ‘it’s that.’

‘You are going to take the ship and her cargo at one steal?’

‘At one steal, Mac. No use taking four bites at a persimmon.’

‘But if you’re caught?’

‘To begin with, we shan’t be : there’s no chance of it. And supposing we were, we’d get it no hotter for taking the whole ship than we should for annexing one of her boats. Now, are you going to be sensible, and bear a hand?’

‘Captain Blake,’ I said, ‘you’re talking to the wrong man. My father was a minister in the Free Kirk of Scotland, and if I’d gone straight I might be living in his manse even to-day. I’ve a failing (and a taste for the sea) which has brought me down to what I am now ; and I’m fond of a good wage ; but neither the one nor the other can induce me to do what you ask. Man, it’s most immoral ; besides, it’s no as safe as you seem to think.’

‘Well, Mac,’ he said, ‘if we don’t trade, we don’t, and there’s an end to it. Only remember I hold your promise not to repeat what’s been spoken.’

‘I’m not likely to forget,’ I said, and took my cap and left the chart-house.

Now, although he had told me he intended to steal the *Shah*, Captain Blake had said nothing about his method ; and when he got to work that very night I had no idea that what was happening came from his hand, and was the outcome of his knavish ingenuity.

I had gone off watch at midnight, had turned in, and had been sleeping some hour and a half when the fireman came to rouse me.

He said, ‘She’s half full of water, sir, and one of the bilge-pumps is broke down. It’s two foot deep over our foot-plates already, and coming in like a mill race. It’ll reach the fires directly, sir, and then it’ll be a case of Golden Shore for all hands if we don’t look out. She must have started a plate as you said, sir, when she took the ground in the pass yonder.’

Of course the yarn about the plate being started when she stuck on the bar ought to have given me the hint. But it did not. When a man is woke out of sleep with news that the ship is settling under him, he has enough to think of in the present without bothering his head about things of that kind ; and I just slipped on a pair of boots and ran to the engine-room in pyjamas just as I was.

The Chief and the Third were hard at work at

the broken bilge-pump, but it wasn't easy work, because every time she rolled down that side a good ten foot of water soused over their ears. The water was gaining, there was no mistake about that; you could feel the steamer grow more sodden with every roll; and it was clear enough that with the one steam-pump we had working we could not keep her afloat another two hours. The stoke hold was full of steam from the ashes falling into the water, and presently the splashings began to hit the bottom of the fire-bars, and the steam grew worse. Then the fires started in to die, and the gauges fell so quickly that you could see them drop. We did not stop the engines. They slowed by degrees, and brought up of themselves. And then, like drowned rats, we went out on deck. The Chief and I were the last to go: there was nothing else to be done.

There was a snoring breeze, with a stiffish sea running. It wasn't cold, because we were in the thick of the Gulf Stream, but the night was as black as coal with driving rain, and not a bit inviting for a boat cruise. However, there was no help for it; Knowles and the two other mates and the carpenter had got the two lifeboats swung out; the stewards and the cook were victualling them; and the hands were bidden to tumble in without any more delay. A tailor could have seen that the old *Shah* had not got very much longer to float.

I wasn't going to lose the things I had bought out of the slop-chest, so I had it in my mind to go

below and put them together. I had got to the head of the companion to do this when Captain Blake came out of the chart-house with the light from inside shining full on his face. He was as cool as a fish and smiling.

'Ah, Mac,' he said, 'glad to see you are keeping your head. I'll remember this in your favour afterwards. Say, just slip into the chart-house here, will you, and take charge of a bag of bullion? Carry it with you to the port lifeboat, and if you get it safely ashore you shall have ten per cent as salvage for your pains. Come right in.'

I stepped into the chart-house, the door closed behind me, and I found myself face on to a curious sight. The carpenter was sitting on the Captain's sofa, and opposite him was one of the deck hands, a fellow who had joined from New Orleans when I did, fingering a nickel-plated revolver.

'Hullo,' said I, 'what does this mean?'

'It means,' says Blake from behind me, 'that you've got to stay right here on this ship, Mac, and be her chief engineer whether you like it or not. Now I've got a knife in my hand this minute'—he laid the cold blade lightly upon the back of my neck for an instant, and then whisked it away again—'and it would annoy me very much to kill you. I've no time for long argument: will you stay alive, or will you stay dead?'

'I've got to save my life,' I said.

'You're a sensible man, Mac. Just sit beside

Chips on the sofa there, and talk to Mr. Legrand. Oh, I forgot to introduce you : Legrand is the new mate. And now I must be off to see that all the members of this ship's company I don't want go off cruising sociably together in the lifeboats.'

He went out into the dark, closing the door on his heels, and I found myself sitting beside the carpenter, looking at the big sallow-faced creole who held the revolver.

'Man,' I said, 'the skipper's gone mad. I've just come from below myself, and I know what it's like. She'll swamp in half-an-hour. Ye're just holding us here to drown.'

'Shucks!' he said, 'that's only part of the game to get the ship to ourselves, and to scare off those other ducks.'

'What do you mean?'

'Why, there have been a couple of sea-cocks opened, that's all ; and if you want to know who did it, here's the man standing before you. I did another thing too ; it was me that smashed that bilge-pump.'

'And who's going to work the ship when the crew have gone?'

'Oh, we'll have eight of a crew, all told, counting in you and me and Chips here, and the skipper. Two of them stowed away in the forehold and two signed on as coal trimmers.'

'I'm shipmates with some very clever scoundrels,' I thought, and wished myself far enough away. But as there was no means of getting clear, I thought it was best to save my throat by doing as I

was bid. Legrand seemed to guess what was passing through my mind. 'Be a sensible man, Mr. McTodd,' said he, 'and do as we want you, and draw your thirty pound a month, and then go ashore and spend it when the time comes. About the right and wrong of the business you have no concern; that lies between us and our consciences; you have been forced into it against your will.'

'Weel,' I said, 'Mr. Legrand, yon's a very sensible way of putting it. You'll go to hell when the time comes. I shan't—and—thirty pound a month's a very pleasant wage to finger.'

'Bonny Scotland,' says Legrand, with a laugh. 'Hullo, here's the skipper again. Well, sir?'

Blake came into the chart-house, his face glistening with the wet. 'They're off,' he said, 'all in the starboard lifeboat, and they blew out of sight in a dozen minutes. Knowles is steering, and the old Chief has manned the bailer. They expect that the balance of us are following them in the port boat to rendezvous at Key West; and as we shan't turn up by to-morrow morning or the next day, we shall be reported lost. Nothing could have happened better. That crowd will be ready to swear, all of them, that they saw the *Shah* founder before they had left her neighbourhood, and so the lot of us can start fresh with purser's names on a fine new steamboat which hasn't cost us a cent.'

'And being without papers,' I said, 'you won't be able to get into a single port to sell her, or to look for freights, or to do anything.'

'My dear Mac,' said Blake, 'do give me credit

for a child's sense. Of course this ship's got papers, a bran-new set of papers, and she's got to be altered to suit them. Her name's the *George M. Washington*, her engines were built at Liverpool, her port—but you'll hear all that afterwards. At present there's work to do, and I guess all hands have got to sweat this night as they never sweated before. Come out now and bear a hand to get the water out of her.'

It was difficult to stand on deck, for every roll sent her down to the rail, and the foredeck was afloat half its time. She lay helpless in the trough, and the water inside her sobbed like crying women. Of course the steam-pumps below were useless, but by a mercy she had a hand-pump on deck, and we manned that, watch and watch about, for half-hour spells, and picked the water out of her by gallons to the minute. The sea-cocks had been turned off, so we'd no further leak, and we got the trysails and the two topsails on her, and shaped a course almost free for the Cuban shore. We hadn't got her clear by daylight, or anything like it, for the hand-pump had its limits; but we'd pulled the water down below the fire-bars of the furnaces, and were able to get lit up again and see the steam rise in the gauges.

It was an anxious time then. If any other steamers saw us drifting about there under sail alone, they would come up to offer assistance, find out who we were, and the game would be up. The spot was likely to be crowded too, because we were in the ship-track between the Gulf ports and the Florida Channel. But the thieves' luck

held, and we got her under steam again, kicked out the balance of the water with the bilge-pumps, and stood across for a lonely bay in Cuba where we could alter the poor old *Shah's* appearance, undisturbed.

We were at anchor there by early afternoon, and a rough, wild place it was, walled in with tropical trees, and closed from all view to seaward. Sea-fowl were the only living creatures which met the eye, unless one could count the sharks and the sawfish which cruised round us in the water. As a pirates' harbour no better spot could have been found in all the world ; and that is what we were then, just pirates : all, that is, except Chips and myself, who were forced into the business against our will.

The work began at once. Stages were rigged over the side, and the black paint was changed to grey. The names on the boats and the lifebuoys were altered. The funnel was turned from red and white to black and blue. The yards were taken off her forrard, the two topmasts sent down, and two ten-foot stump topmasts put on end in their place. The Clyde name-plates were shifted from the engines, and the wheel-house was knocked away from the upper bridge. She looked a different ship. The grey paint and the stump topmasts seemed to make the *George M. Washington* half as big again as the British steamer *Shah* that had sailed out of the Mississippi river. I could have sworn that her own builders wouldn't have recognised the ship, even if they had stood beside her on a dock wall.

Well, there was no time lost after that work was done. We were not there pleasuring, any of us, and we upped anchor as soon as we had finished transmogrifying her, and set out for the Horn and the Chilian Coast. Legrand was for putting in to some Brazilian port to stay and pick up a few more hands; but Captain Blake said 'No.' He was not a nervous man, but he was no fool to stand in the way of unnecessary risks. The *George M. Washington* was to keep out of all human sight till she made her Chilian port, and then no one would connect her with the *Shah* which had been lost in the Mexican Gulf. She was to get a cargo from there to China, or else go across in ballast, and in China she was to be sold. That was the programme. He was quite aware it would be desperately hard work for all hands, but the pay was big to match, and they could have free run of all the grub in the ship. Besides, he was not sparing himself.

He was all civility in his talk; he'd a smile and a good word for everybody; but Captain Blake was not the man you'd care to be across with. He quite gave you the notion that he'd as soon stick you as look at you if it came to refusing to do exactly what he wished.

Now the end of this pirating business came in a way which no one had quite foreseen; and though the underwriters did not get back the insurance they had paid on the *Shah*, the *George M. Washington* was never turned into a tangible profit by those who had stolen her.

It seems that Mr. Knowles, the former first

mate, had taken the starboard lifeboat safely enough into the Key West ; had found himself out of a berth ; was given the offer of captaincy on a guano barque then in Panama, whose late master had died of Coast fever ; and had jumped at the chance. He got a cast down to Aspinwall in a tramp ; crossed the isthmus by railroad ; and left Panama for the south, the very day we pulled our anchors out of that bay of Cuba. It was not much of a coincidence that he should be coming in to Callao roadstead through the North Channel past San Lorenzo Island, when we were steaming in through the Southern.

We were in first, and had brought to an anchor, waiting for the health officer. I was half dead with work and heat, and had come up out of the engine room, and was sat in a chair under the bridge deck awning getting a spell of rest. There was a glare from the water which hurt, so by way of ease I kept my drowsy eyes on a little old barque that was coming in under lower topsails, with just enough breeze to give her steerage-way. She was heading so as to pass within a dozen yards of us, and I watched her with eyes that did not see. Presently the sound of voices come dully to my ears.

‘The colour of her sides is different ; the funnel’s different ; those stump topmasts are different ; and the wheel-house is unshipped from the upper bridge. Still, she’s remarkably like my old ship for all that.’

‘But she’s got a starboard lifeboat. It was the starboard you went off in, wasn’t it, Captain ?’

'That's not a lifeboat in those starboard davits. That's a quarter-boat they've shifted from aft. And the after-davits have been unshipped. Look, you can see the sockets of them. By Gum, matey, I believe it is the *Shah* and no other.'

I was beginning to wake up. The conversation went on.

'Can't be, Captain. Look at the name all over her, *George M. Washington*. That's no name for a British ship. I can't say, though, come to look at her, that she does look much like a blazing Yankee.'

'Yankee be hanged. Look at those main shrouds. I rattled them down myself in Pensacola, and we put in wire for every third ratline.'

'Whatever for?'

'Sure I can't say. Some crank the Old Man had. Perhaps he was off his nut: he died directly after of Yellow Jack. But wire it was, and if you look there, you'll see it for yourself. By Gum, it is the *Shah*, sure as death. She's been run away with, and for a bet it's that mealy-mouthed Blake that's done it. However, Blake or whoever it was, I'm going to lay information so soon as ever I can get ashore to the Custom House. I'd a good berth on that ship, and I don't thank the man who kicked me from there to come and be skipper of this stinking old dung-hill here.'

I was awake enough by this time, and had recognised Knowles, and was beginning to wonder why he had not recognised me. But then I remembered that first of all I was sitting in deep

shadow, and, secondly, I was wearing a five weeks' beard, so I lay still where I was till the guano barque had dragged slowly past over the swells, and then I got up and slipped into the chart-house. There was no need to tell my news. Captain Blake had heard every word that had been said through a port above his bedplace.

He looked at me as coolly as though everything was smooth. 'It's a beastly nuisance, isn't it, Mac, just when we were so near fingering our dividends too?'

'Then shall I lose my wages?' I asked.

'I guess, Mac, you can earn nothing more out of this cruise at present than a hemp necktie.'

'Oh, I'm clear of that at any rate. Man, do ye no remember I was forced into the business against my will?'

'Quite so. Go ashore and tell that to the authorities. They're certain to believe your bare word on the subject?'

'*Phew!*' I whistled. It hadn't struck me that way. Of course I had got no sort of a tale which would be believed when it came to putting it in bare words.

'No, my son,' said Blake. 'It's a case of all sticking together yet, and with luck we'll not only save our necks but we'll realise on the ship.'

'We've only two days' more coal.'

'I know that.'

'Then what's your plan, Captain?'

'I'll tell it you later. For the present go away right now and make steam again. I guess we've little enough time to waste. There's a cruiser

over yonder that can put to sea in two hours, and they'll send word to her directly Knowles gets ashore with his news. Away with you now and make your sweeps hump themselves, or else they'll hang.'

There was every inducement for hurry, and every one knew that. Legrand was down helping me, and so was the carpenter. We coaxed the steam up by every means we knew, and when at last Legrand was able to go on the foredeck and heave up, it was none too soon. The cruiser astern of us was bustling with life; a naphtha launch was coming to us from the inner harbour as fast as she could pelt; and it was plain that all Callao was alive with Knowles's tidings. The skipper had got the upper bridge alone, and held the steam steering-wheel in his own hands. He was heading her for the Northern Channel between San Lorenzo Island and the land, and as usual he was taking matters quite calmly and with a smile on his saintly face. He neither swore nor shouted. He was the most unaccountable ship-master I ever came across in that way.

But it was the naphtha launch that destroyed us. We started slow, and she nearly boarded; but as steam got us so did our pace improve, till at last she could do no more than keep her place. If he could once have shaken her off, I believe Captain Blake would have found some plan for escape; but as it was, that was out of the question. There was not a breath of wind. The long Pacific swells came rolling in from the westward, so that when we were in a trough we could not see where they

broke in thunder on the beach ; and all the time that naphtha launch hung doggedly in our wake

The hands were making steam for everything they were worth, and all I had to do was to run about my machinery with a hot oil kettle and keep everything lubricated. It said much for my keeping of those engines the way they bucked up to the work then. They couldn't have run smoother if ten men with chief's tickets had been tending them every day since they left the shops. I wish the beastly Board of Trade examiners could have seen me then.

The excitement was too big for me to keep myself below all the time. I just had to pop my head out of the engine-room door every now and again to look astern. But if for a moment the naphtha launch was out of sight, she'd roll up again high against the horizon over the next swell, and if we dropped her at all, it was only for a few fathoms to the hour. Still, it wasn't her duty to board. She was only acting as jackal to the bigger craft, and presently the masts and smoke of that showed up against the sea-line. Landsmen might have chucked up the sponge then. But we hung on. Everything was possible in a stern chase at sea ; besides, darkness would be down in another hour, and we might slip away under its cover. We felt cramped about the throat, I can tell you, then. It didn't take much imagination to see the gallows ready rigged.

Night came down when the cruiser was five miles astern ; but it did not help us. The sky was lit like a theatre ; the swells were full of

speckles of phosphorescence ; and where they broke upon the beach you might have thought there was a line of bonfires. The cruiser followed us, and came up as though she had a line to our stern and was heaving of it in on her winches.

At a mile and a half she began to shoot, and I'll not say her practice was good. I stood outside my engine-room door when I could spare a moment to watch, and saw the shots plough gutters in the swells, and send fountains of flame far towards the sky.

Then of a sudden the motion changed ; the roll gave way to a steady pitch ; and I knew what had happened. Captain Blake had starboarded his helm, and was going to put the stolen steamer on the beach. Well, there was a poor enough chance for us there in all that surf. A minute later there was a whistle down the voice-tube, and he told me in words what I had guessed already. He said also we'd be on the ground inside a dozen minutes, and we were all to come on deck, so as to get best chance of reaching shore.

I said, 'Aye, aye,' and told the hands, and they went willingly enough. But for myself I stayed. I'd got my engines to look after. It was pretty tough work waiting, though. I marked off twelve minutes on the engine-room clock and lit my pipe. But I had to fill it twice before time was up. The tobacco seemed to burn quicker than usual, somehow.

At last she did it. She took the ground somewhere forward, and jarred fit to knock one's teeth out. Then she lifted on a swell and lit the whole

of her length on the ground, till you'd have thought the foot-plates would have risen up through your cap. Then she lifted twice more, and began to make a noise like a meat tin does when boys kick it along a paved street.

By that time she had broached to, and as she was on her beam ends with the engines racing badly, I shut off the throttle before the poor things rived themselves clear of their bed-plates. Then I opened the escape valve to the full, and climbed out on deck. The seas were making a clean breach over her by that time, but I did notice that the port lifeboat was gone, and the falls showed she'd been lowered. There was not a living man left in sight, but whether they had been washed overboard, or had gone away in the boat, I could not tell. I never saw any of them again.

The door I was holding to went with the next sea, and there was I in the surf, two hundred yards off the dry beach. I can swim like a rat or a Krooboy, and I had to do it then. That Pacific surf is something awful when one of those big ground swells is on.

But I got spewed up by the sea at last, bruised as though I had been beaten with sticks, and there I lay on the sand and watched the surf smash my beautiful engines till they weren't fit to put on the scrap heap. The cruiser had done her work and was steaming back for Callao; the naphtha launch was out of sight; the lifeboat, if she had survived, had slipped far away from view; and the sea lay empty.

Day sprang up over the water, and I got up stiffly and walked north along the coast. A dozen miles brought me to an Indian village, where I must say that, niggers though they were, they treated me like a king. I stayed there six months, and might have stayed a lifetime. But I was a fool, and got restless. The sea always drags me. And I went along to a little port and found a ship. The sea always does drag me like that. It is my luck, I suppose, to be that kind of a fool.

Of course, Captain Blake treated me badly, and I worked a long time, and very hard, without a sixpence of wage. But somehow I don't wish that man evil. I've never come across any one with a nicer knowledge of drugs, or a freer hand in giving them out to his engineer officers. Why, I must have taken eight boxes of those Cody's pills at the very least.

CHAPTER III

THE TREASURE FISHING

I FANCY the two divers must have been in it from the very first, and indeed I've a strong notion the whole plot to steal the treasure was in the beginning theirs, and theirs alone. I can't be sure, but I've an idea that Miss Bradbury came into the business soon after we sailed from Liverpool ; and if one may hazard a guess, it was because Willie Cameron, the diver with the black hair, fell in love with her and let out the secret. However, I didn't arrive at any of this till later ; and if I hadn't been lugged into the business by the veriest outside chance, it's my belief the three of them would have walked off with all the gold, and the Salvage Company would never have seen so much as the bare colour of it.

There was a distinct understanding between me and Captain Boyd when I signed on as 'third' of the *Gatherer* that I was only doing it as a personal obligation to himself. The berths of second and chief engineer had been filled ; they wanted a man who wouldn't mind bearing a hand if anything went wrong with the diving tackle ; and they

couldn't have picked a better than myself. I was thoroughly well grounded in the shops before ever I thought of the sea ; and though I say it, few better fitters and all-round mechanics have ever stood on the foot-plates of a steamboat's engine-room. If it wasn't for the Board of Trade and their rotten examinations, I'd have been chief long ago ; and with a chief's ticket in my pocket, you may be sure I'd have got master-hand over the whisky—at any rate at sea, and in sight of any one that mattered ashore.

Of course it was a condescension for a man like me to be third on a bit of a steamboat like this *Gatherer* ; but I was drawing eight pounds a month, which was the same as the second engineer got ; and I'll not deny I was in a manner forced into taking the first berth that offered. I'd been paid off from my last ship in Liverpool ; I'd met friends who knew Ballindrochater, where my father had been Free Kirk minister ; and we'd got a little noisy, and found trouble. The fat English brute of a magistrate did give us the option, but it took all the money I had left to pay myself out.

I might even admit, too, that the business of the *Gatherer* had some attraction for me. She was off treasure fishing to the Canaries ; she was chartered by a little company that called itself 'The s.s. *Corinth* Salvage Association' ; and the work for her engineers promised to be light. We should steam down Channel, through the Bay, and down to the spot amongst the Islands where the *Corinth* had been sunk. And there we should swing at anchor whilst the boats went off with the divers

to do their work. We should keep banked fires in case an on-shore breeze came and we had to steam out, but as a general thing there would be no watches for us engineers, and full pay going all the time.

‘It’ll be the softest job you’ve tumbled into for many a long day, Mr. McTodd,’ said the Old Man when he offered me the berth. ‘We shall be quite a family ship. There’s a big large cabin, and we shall all mess together—mates, engineers, divers, and passengers,—with your Chief at one end of the table and me at the other.’

‘Passengers!’ said I; ‘I thought this was a salvage job?’

‘They are coming just for the cruise: a Mr. Kent and his wife, and her sister, a Miss Bradbury. Of course the *Gatherer* hasn’t got a passenger certificate, so they’ll have to sign on articles like the rest of us to get to windward of the Board of Trade. The ladies will be stewardesses, and Mr. Kent can take his choice between being doctor and fourth mate.’

‘Are they interested in this salvage business?’

‘Not a bit,’ said Captain Boyd. ‘They’re people of means, and Miss Bradbury writes novels. They pay for their grub and rooms like they would on a regular packet. They’re just coming to see the diving and get a blow of sea air, and I shouldn’t wonder but what the young lady writes a book about it when she gets home; so keep your hair combed straight, Mr. McTodd. It’s a pretty big affair, anyway. The *Corinth* took down £270,000 worth of gold with her when she

founded. She was a Cape boat, you know, coming home.'

'Her propeller shaft broke, didn't it, somewhere in the after end of the tunnel?'

'That's the idea, Mac. There was a breeze on at the time, and I suppose she was racing badly. And it ripped the stern plating all to smithereens when it went. Of course the sliding door to the shaft tunnel jammed when it was wanted, and so she had just got to swamp. There was no help for it. They'd half-an-hour to get clear in, and the boats saved about two-thirds of her people. I guess the rest of the poor beggars are in her now, and an ugly sight they'll be for the divers when they go down to try to weigh that gold.'

The Captain had other business to attend to then, so I left him; but after we got fairly started, and had dropped our Mersey pilot at Point Lynas, there was information about the work ahead for any one who chose to listen. The talk was upon nothing else. The three passengers fairly brimmed with it. They said treasure diving was 'so romantic.'

For myself, when I thought of those dead bones guarding chests of gold far down in the slime, and the weed, and the cold wash of the sea, I thought the business was merely grisly. But then I never did understand the ways of these writing people. They would have suited my father better. He was a writer that every one who reads will have heard of. It was he that wrote *Sixty-two Years in Ballindrochater*, by 'A Scourger of Sin.'

I cannot say either that Miss Bradbury was my idea of a woman who could write a book. To begin with she was young, and as bonnie-looking a lassie as you could pick during a three hours' search in Buchanan Street, Glasgow. She'd a fine colour to her cheeks, and big brown eyes that fairly lit when she warmed up in her talk. She was not small, but her white canvas shoes would stand within the palm of my hand. I tried that one day when the steward was pipeclaying them. She'd a guitar with her on board, and when we got to south across the Bay, and the nights grew warm, she'd sit out in the moonlight and sing. Her music was nothing in my line, though ; it was all of the flighty sort ; but then it was not made directly for my pleasure. Cameron was the man she sang for, and though at first she disguised this, before we rose the Canary mountains above the sea-line she was not shy of letting it be seen by any one who chose to look. And Willie Cameron liked her in return ; and if ever I saw it, love glowed out of the eyes of those two.

We were fellow-countrymen, Cameron and I (I'm Scottish myself), and at one time and another the pair of us put in a fairish deal of talk. His air-pump needed a bit of an overhaul, and as I was set on to help him, we had plenty of opportunity. But I'll not say we got much off general topics. He seemed a man in a desperate hurry to get rich, and 'most every day he'd ask me if I could point him out a plan. But my answer to him was always the same.

'Man,' I'd say, 'I'd no' be acting as third

engineer on an odd-job steamboat like this if I'd a plan handy to my fingers such as you seem to want.'

And then he'd shake his head, and sigh, and fall to talking about the methods by which he and his mates hoped to get the gold boxes out of the wreck, and down into the *Gatherer's* hold. I suppose I ought to have seen what he was after then. But I didn't. I'd only got it in mind that he wanted to marry Miss Bradbury, and didn't see his way to fingering enough ready money to set up housekeeping on.

We'd an easy Bay and a good run down, and we made Grand Canary one morning just before the dawn. We ran into Las Palmas harbour and saw Teneriffe far away across the sand neck, with the snow on its head rosy in the sunrise. We'd a day there making arrangements, and getting in some stores, and then we steamed out again and made for the spot where the *Corinth* had gone down, and brought up to an anchor, and lowered fires.

Before us lay the open sea ; behind were the dry cinder hills of Grand Canary ; and above was blue heaven and a sun of dancing brass. The day was frizzling ; the island gave us a lee out of the South-East Trade ; and there was no breath of wind astir. The water lay like a sheet of metal. No divers could have asked for a better prospect. We got their two boats into the water each with air-pump, rowers, coxswain, man to tend the life-lines, and men to pump, and off they rowed, a hundred yards apart. Presently the air-pumps

began to turn, and the diver, like some white uncanny sea-beast, went over from each. After a pause the boats pulled slowly ahead. Cameron and his mate were walking along the sea-floor searching for the wreck.

I was off watch and stood leaning my elbows on the t'gallant rail of the lower deck, and smoked, and looked about me. The water was full of those little pink-sailed jelly-fish that we sea-folk call Portuguese Men o' War, though 'Nautilus' is, I believe, the fancy name. I pointed them out to Miss Bradbury, who was standing near, and asked her if she'd like one caught.

'Do you think there's much danger, Mr. McTodd?' says she.

'They've just a wee sting to them if they get upon your hands,' said I. 'But there's no need to touch them. You can just gratify your een and then we'll fling them overboard again. They're no' beauties ye'd care to keep and take home with ye like a canary bird.'

'What do you mean?' says she.

'I'm talking of these Portuguese Men o' War.'

She put her hand upon my arm, and I looked up into her face and saw it was as white as paper, saving for black rings under the eyes. 'I beg your pardon, Mr. McTodd, for being so inattentive. I'm afraid my thoughts are under the sea instead of on top of it. Is this diving very dangerous work? Their air tubes may get entangled.'

'They're too old hands to let them foul.'

'Or they may get swept away by currents?'

'Their life-lines will keep them in tow.'

‘Or sharks?’

‘Sharks are always feared at divers, Miss Bradbury. No, Miss, you may believe me, those two men are as safe down at work below as you are here, or safer, seeing that they can’t get sunstroke, and you very likely will if you stay here away from the awnings with no hat on.’

She shivered and thanked me and went away into the shade, and I turned again and watched the boats, and the two moving patches of muddied water which they were following. It struck me at the moment that the s.s. *Corinth* Salvage Association were putting an enormous deal of trust in the two men whom they employed as their divers. £270,000 worth of gold is a very vast bulk of wealth for poor men to be near.

They did not find the wreck that day or the next. Indeed, not till a week had passed did they come across her, and then they found that she had settled on her broadside into a little gulley of the sea-floor where a current had carried silt over her till she was almost covered out of sight. They buoyed her when she was found, and that day I went off in Cameron’s boat and tried to see if I could make her out from above. But she lay in sixteen fathoms, and the water was grey with mud from them working below. Looking down into it was like trying to peer through a mist.

The *Gatherer* swung to her anchor over the Western Ocean swells, and the sun bleached her awnings to the whiteness of new-fallen snow. For myself, but for one thing, I never had such an easy time on full pay during all my sea-

going. There was no work to do ; a tot of grog was served out, Coast-fashion, at eight bells ; the slop-chest tobacco burnt slowly and cost only two shillings a pound ; and I had the pleasant knowledge that my old mother at home would be drawing a good half-pay. But there was one thing worried me, and that was Miss Bradbury. She had joined at Liverpool as fine and rosy a lassie as one could wish to meet, and here she was getting whiter and thinner every day. You could almost see the flesh slip away from her bones, and she'd an appearance of scare and worry about her face that made one sick to look at. All hands saw it ; there was no avoiding such a thing ; but they put it down to anxiety about Cameron.

The pair of them were openly engaged to marry by this time, and I must say the way that he and the other diver worked was a caution. Of course the water was warm, but it was fairish deep, and I never saw men stay down longer. They never seemed to give in whilst they had strength left to lift a hand, and when they came to the surface and had their gear taken off, they'd be almost fainting with weariness from what they'd gone through. And it wasn't a one-day occurrence either. They were always the same, and the weeks slipped away till they had run into a month, and still none of the gold had been brought to the *Gatherer*.

The silt was the trouble, it seemed. As fast as they dug it out, just so fast did it slide down again into the steamer's bowels, and the strong room which lay right down against her keel could

not be come at. Of course one understood that Cameron's reputation depended upon his bringing off this salvage job successfully, but I don't see the force of a man killing himself, and I told him so more than once. I fancied at the time that Miss Bradbury was telling him the same thing every day ; but he didn't take any notice of either of us, nor did Storey, the other diver ; and the pair of them just worked themselves to rags.

A stopper was put on their game, however, in a way they did not expect. The steward brought word one morning that the captain wanted to see me, and I turned out of my bunk and went on deck. He seemed in a bit of a worry.

'Mr. Storey's had a stroke,' says he.

'I've told that man a dozen times to take drugs, sir,' said I, 'and he never would.'

'Drugs are all very well for us, Mac,' says he, 'that have ordinary stomachs, but drugs wouldn't have saved Storey what he's got, and that's paralysis.'

'My certie !' said I.

'It's true,' said the Old Man. 'It took him whilst he was in the boat. Cameron had just gone down, and Storey was going to follow when he was seized. They took off his helmet and brought him back here, and he's down in his room now with half of him dead and no speech left.'

'It's a complaint, I've heard, that often does seize divers.'

'It does if they stick to the trade too long. Well, Mac, I'm wanting some one to take his

place, and I give you first offer. It'll mean five pounds a week above and beyond your present pay, and there's nothing to hinder your earning it.'

'Nothing that I see, sir. Storey and I are just in a build, and I can wear his suit.'

'Very well then, but just give me your hand for half a minute, and look me in the eye.'

I did that.

'Now,' said he, 'you're a servant or the "*Corinth* Salvage Association," and I'm another. Your father was a gentleman, wasn't he?'

'He was that, sir, and one of the most honoured Free Kirk ministers in Scotland.'

'Then you must be a gentleman, too, though I daresay you are not always treated as such. Now swear to me, Mac, on your honour, as a gentleman, that you'll be true to those that are employing you.'

I looked him in the face and did it cheerfully. When a man treats me properly (and God knows few enough of them have tried it), he's got a fellow to work for him that he ought to value highly.

I got into the suit as the boat rowed me out to the buoy, and when we picked up the mooring, the men screwed on the helmet for me and started the air pump. It wasn't a new experience to me: I'd been diving before in the Clyde to bore holes into a sunken pier with a ratchet-drill.

I went over the side, took the rope, and lowered myself hand over fist down through the grey water till the leaden soles on my feet touched

ground. The corky feeling was a bit new again at first, but I soon got over that ; and then as my air-valves were working all right, and I could breathe quite easy, I set about looking for Cameron. He was somewhere out of sight, but his air-tube was lying on the mud amongst the sea-shrubs like a thin white eel, and I followed that easily enough.

It led me to the *Corinth*, where she lay with her decks straight up and down, and I saw it passing away through the watery blackness down her companion hatch. There seemed something wrong here. Where were all the great moving banks of slime the divers had told us about? Where was the filthy ooze which slid back against the steamer as fast as they dug it away? Slime there was in plenty ; I sank in it knee-deep in spite of the buoyancy of the suit ; but it was quite manageable ; and the *Corinth's* companion lay far above its mark. A rope lay against the upright deck beside the white air-tube. I thought a minute, and then laid hold and swarmed up. Inside all was dark ; but I switched on light in the electric lamp I had with me, and the glow lit the place like a foggy street.

The first step landed me on something that crunched. I looked down and saw it was a suit of bones, skimmed clean by the fishes. Some poor wretch had been drowned there when the steamer foundered. Well, of course, I'd seen a skeleton before, but somehow or other those bones didn't seem to cheer me. There was something wrong : the yarn the divers had brought up, and

the real thing as it lay, were two entirely different matters. It occurred to me that I had stumbled (by the accident of Storey's paralysis) upon something intended to be hid ; and I was quite man enough to know that trouble might very possibly follow.

I stopped where I was, and thought. I'd a big mind to go back then and report what I had seen. I felt I should be earning my pay by doing that. But at the same time I liked Cameron ; he was a fellow-countryman, and more beside, and I didn't want to report him as acting off the square ; so I stoutened my heart and went on down below.

The white trail of the air-pipe led me down the stair to the lowest berth deck, then along the alley-way right aft, and then into a cabin with a hatch in the floor. Sitting on the lip of the hatch was Cameron, who turned round when my light fell upon him. He beckoned me with an impatient gesture, and slipped down into the blackness below. It was clear he did not recognise me ; he took it for granted that I was Storey, delayed by some accident. For a moment I stayed outside irresolute, and a shoal of small fish, attracted by the light, brushed past my legs. I remembered that they had been browsing on corpses, and were prospecting me as food, and the idea made me shudder inside my rubber clothes. Then I thought good to see exactly what was going to happen, and slipped through the hatch after Cameron.

We were in the *Corinth's* strong room. The gold was beneath and around us, in iron-bound boxes, built together like the bricks of a wall. Cameron lifted an end of one of the

boxes, and nodded his helmeted head towards me impatiently. I took hold, and together we swung it up through the water, and out through the hatch. Then he scrambled up himself, and I followed. Again we lifted the box, treading with care along the slimy alley-ways, so as not to foul our air-pipes. I could feel the bones of the dead shift beneath my feet, and my chest was tight with labour. In spite of the buoyancy of the water, the box of gold was as much as the pair of us could struggle along with.

At last with infinite toil we came out through the companion hatch, and lowered the box with a rope down to the bed of slime below. We followed it, lifting it between us again, and wallowed on with it through the morass of slime. The herbage of the sea brushed our shoulders as we struggled on; the skeletons of the dead stood sentinel along our path; and the cold silence of the water crushed into my spirit. We held our way right round the steamer's bows, and there against her keel we came upon a pit. It had been dug through the slime with infinite labour, and shored up with planking. With a rope we lowered the gold chest down into the pit, and Cameron followed. I switched on my lamp and saw him heaving and thrusting it down a gallery which led far beneath the iron sheathing of the wreck. A shovel lay against a sea shrub at the lip of the pit. I took it in my hand. I was away from the world of air; in this lonely world of water Cameron and I were the only human occupants, with none to overlook us; and I felt that I ought to be on

my guard against him. From his point of view it was clear I knew too much.

Presently he returned from out of the pit, and was about to go back again round the bows of the steamer ; but I touched him with my shovel, and he turned. Then I pointed to the front glass of my helmet, and he came up close and peered at my face, and as quickly recoiled. Then again he came towards me, this time with clenched fists ; but I menaced him with the uplifted shovel, and he kept his distance. How I longed for speech then to say to him what I wished !

For a full minute we stared at one another, and then with a sudden gesture he picked a fragment of stone from the ground, and wrote a message on the rusted plating of the wreck.

'Hold your tongue, Mac,' I read, *'and you shall share.'*

I wrote a laborious reply with the peak of the shovel : *'Cannot deal with you. Am bound to employers.'*

He scribbled *'£25,000,'* and watched my face.

I shook my head inside the helmet.

He wrote *'£30,000,'* and looked at me again.

I wrote, *'Not for £270,000.'* I saw he was ready to spring upon me, and held the shovel edge above my shoulder handy to cut him down.

He considered for a minute, and then wrote : *'If you blow on me you will kill her. She knows. She never liked the idea, but I persuaded her into it. We wanted to marry; we wanted to be rich; there was no other way. She is half dead with anxiety. You must have seen that?'*

I nodded. He wrote on :

'Then consider her, Mac, and make your own fortune at the same time.'

I could not stand any more of this. I have been poor enough all my life, and God knows I ken the value of siller. And then there was the poor old mother at home in Ballindrochater that I had never been able to keep in the position that was her due. If it had not been that Captain Boyd treated me in the way he did, and looked in my eye when he gave me the job, I'll not say what might have happened. It takes a strong man to resist the bigger kind of temptations, and—I'm no' ower lusty. I beckoned to the water surface above with my shovel, and took a step forward. With his arm he implored me to pause.

'Are you going to report what you have seen?' he wrote.

I shrugged my shoulders.

Through the glass of his helmet I saw his face harden.

'I give you fair warning,' he wrote on the rusted iron, *'that if you do, I will kill you first and then myself. So you will not find it cheap to ruin me.'*

I nodded my head to show I understood, and beckoned him to go on. He lifted his hands; I thought he was going to grapple with me; and I slashed at him with the shovel. He drew back, and once on the move I drove him before me furiously. He might be desperate, but I was savage enough myself. The thought of all that

wealth lying within touch made me grit my teeth in cruel rage. If only the skipper had not said what he did !

We ploughed our way across the slimy sea-floor to where the boats lay at moorings, and first Cameron went up, and then I followed. On the row back to the *Gatherer* we said nothing, either of us ; and for long enough we did not find opportunity of being alone. But that night, when most of the hands were turned in, he and I sat out together on the bridge deck, and he talked, whilst I looked out at the stars where they hung above the black ridges of the Island.

He told me the whole tale of what he and Storey intended to do. They could not go far from the wreck, as the air bubbles rising to the surface would be an advertisement of their movements ; so they had to set to work and make a hiding-place for their plunder close at hand. They decided to dig out a chamber beneath the steamer, and infinite labour it cost them. Meanwhile, to mask what they were doing, they gave out the tale of the ooze covering the treasure out of reach. Their efforts were nearly ended when Storey got his stroke ; the pit was made ; part of the gold was already transported ; and when the rest was hid, then they intended to cover the mouth of the pit so that it never could be found by chance explorers. Then they were going to tell Captain Boyd that the job beat them, and get his permission to blow into the *Corinth's* strong room with dynamite from the outside. The explosion would be so contrived that the steamer would be

rived to pieces, and the ooze would cover all her fragments.

‘You think that the *Gatherer* would return home, then?’ I asked.

‘There would be nothing else for it.’

‘But the Company would send out another expedition.’

‘Let them send out ten : they’d find nothing.’

‘And afterwards?’

‘Storey and I were going to charter a schooner, put diving tackle on board, and come out here again by ourselves. We could weigh the gold in a couple of days, and I know of a market.’

‘Well, Storey will never use limbs or tongue again.’

‘I’m sure of it. Mac, you must take his place. We two and one other can work the schooner, and a year from now we’ll be rich men. Think of it, lad : rich beyond what you ever thought of. Think of it : no more having to stand your watch at sea ; no more sea at all. You can stay in England, and marry, and live a decent life. Think of it, Mac!’

I was thinking of it. As I sat there watching the heat-lightning wink amongst the black hills of Grand Canary, I was remembering that it was a chance such as I’d never had before in my life, and one which would never come to me again. I’d been kicked about the world ever since I first went a wee bit wrong in Ballindrochater, and I’d sworn never to see the place more till I’d enough siller to build a house there as big as the manse itself to put my mother in, to shame those who wagged the

finger at me. I hungered for the old spot again, with its grey houses, and the brown moorland at the back ; I could do a power of good in the place (the deil told me then), if I went back rich, and enlightened with all my store of foreign travel. But then, what the captain had said came back to me : how he reminded me I'd been born a gentleman, and how he'd treat me as my father's son, and trust to my honour ; and I stood to my feet and swore.

I'm no' a profane man as a general thing ; it always seems to me there's small profit to be got out of mere swearing ; but I cursed then till Cameron blenched before me, and the air ought to have tasted sulphury.

'Look here,' I said to him. 'I give you your choice : those boxes are to be taken back from the pit, and stowed back inside the *Corinth* to-morrow ; then we'll announce that we've dug away the mud, and can get at the strong room ; and next day we'll warp the *Gatherer* across, rig a whip, and let her hoist them on board, one by one, with her own winch. If you'll do this, I'll work with you so long as my arms will move ; if you refuse, I'll go to the Old Man now, and tell him what I know.'

'You are playing me a very dirty game,' he said.

I stormed at him. 'Am I ?' I cried. 'Couldn't I get you into gaol? Couldn't I have you put in irons this moment as a common thief? But I want to help you out of your mess, because of a reason you know.'

‘Why in thunder, man, won’t you help yourself, too, and be rich?’

‘Because of a reason you would not understand.’

‘It may be a dangerous deal for you yet,’ he said grimly.

‘Ah, there,’ said I, ‘I’ve insured myself. I’ve thought that if an accident happened to me below the water yonder, you might forget to be honest. So I’ve written out an account of what I know, and sealed it; and if I don’t turn up, the envelope will be opened.’

‘You’ve pinned me,’ he said.

‘I think so.’

He stared at me queerly for a minute and then he spoke again. ‘Do you know, Mac,’ said he, ‘I’m not so sorry for it as you might think. I was led into this precious scheme by some one else. But I’m not going to blame anybody now that can’t be here to speak for himself. And besides, I’ll freely admit that I was keen enough upon the chance when it was put in my way; it seemed so safe; and it was such a thumping big plum to go for. I guess we’ve most of us kept honest through fear of being found out.’

‘And besides, things are no’ always as safe as they look.’

‘You’re right, Mac; and I’ll remember that for the future; and I guess it’ll scare me into keeping straight.’

‘Yon’s no’ a very healthy way of looking at it,’ said I.

‘I’ll admit that,’ says he, ‘but from Society’s

point of view it's a very useful one. We're funny animals. I feel far easier now than I did an hour ago, and I know some one else who'll be easier too.'

'That will be Miss Bradbury you're speaking of?'

'Maybe so, maybe no,' said he. 'The person I have in mind writes books, and has a great liking for romance, and told me almost as soon as we met that it was a pity the old days were gone when there were pirates and all that sort of stuff, and sea life was more exciting. We got intimate, that writer and I, Mac, and the tale of this game here with the gold-boxes slipped out. I claimed there was every bit as much romance in that as there was in the old-time buccaneering.'

'And she agreed to let you go on with it just because she loved you,' said I, 'and then ate her heart out with fear lest you should get dropped upon. Man, you need go no further with the yarn. It's been plain to the eyes of every one that's watched the lassie about the decks that she was just fretting herself to a shadow about something.'

'It's made me nearly cry to see her,' says he.

'Weel, man,' said I, 'it's over now, and she can begin to put on flesh again so soon as ever you choose to tell her the new plan. If I mistake not, yon's the flutter of a dress in the companion-way this minute. I'll be away forrard and turn in. Maybe you'll have business here ye'd rather talk of out of my hearing.'

And a minute later I heard the hum of their

voices, and guessed Cameron was getting rid of his new version of the tale. So that was the way the gold boxes from the *Corinth* found their way into the *Gatherer's* hold, but I fancy Captain Boyd must have thought all along that there was something going on which was not quite according to rule. Still, how he found it out I can't say. Storey couldn't have told him, since the man never found speech again; it was certain that neither Cameron nor Miss Bradbury would have let it out; and most assuredly I did not.

But after we got back to Liverpool, and all hands from the *Gatherer* turned out to see our diver married to his girl, the Old Man pulled me aside as we left the church, and crumpled a couple of twenty-pound Bank of England notes into my hands, and, 'those,' said he, 'are from the Salvage Company. I told them I thought you deserved a dash. I told them I thought they were owing you a matter of £270,000, but I couldn't get more for you Mac, my lad, and perhaps you are better without it. Companies are not addicted to giving away tips when they aren't forced, and third engineers, Mac—well, they have thirsts, haven't they, my lad?'

Well, I suppose he was right. I know I had clean pockets a week later.

CHAPTER IV

LOST WITH ALL HANDS

It seems that even up till to-day men look upon the foundering of the *Stuttgart* as a case of 'all hands,' and I know it did get into the papers that out of the four hundred and three live men and women that sailed in her out of Corunna not one even touched land again, except those few that the seas spewed up on some of the Portuguese reefs as smashed and draggled corpses. But I was on board that steamer myself when she happened her accident—I'd signed on in Hamburg, and I'm sitting here now in Ballindrochater; and that English coal-trimmer who called himself Vaughan (though that was merely a purser's name) came to shore again also, none the worse for what he'd gone through, save for that cut the oar-blade gave him just above the bridge of his nose. Whether Vaughan has met his latter end since is beyond my knowledge. I haven't set eyes on the man since we parted.

The *Stuttgart* was a Clyde-built ship, and in the sixties had been one of the fliers of the Western

Ocean trade. They'd driven her then pretty hard, you may bet ; but that was in the days of low pressure, and bumping into the head seas at seven knots hadn't done her very much harm. When she was cast from the passenger line she was put on to cargo for a bit till she got too slow and extravagant, and then she was sold to a Copenhagen firm who went burst over her, and finally she was bought by the Germans for the River Plate run. They put triple expansions in her, and sent her out of Hamburg four voyages a year, and by cutting expenses, and getting bounties, they made fine dividends—fine for Germans, that is.

It's nothing to my credit that a man of abilities like mine should have been on such a vessel at all. But I may as well admit that I'd been at my old games again, and had little choice left me. That salvage job in the Canaries was just over, and there was that forty-pound bonus. Any one but a cur would have sent the money to the old lady at home ; but I thought well to just wet it ; and of course once a start was made, the whole lot went tripping into other folks' pouches. I'm a very careful man in ordinary ; but with whisky in me, you might think I was Prince of Wales by the way I can fling good siller broadcast.

When I'd my pockets cleaned, I must needs try and borrow from a policeman. I'd stood him beer when I was flush, and told him then I was due to have something back from him. He replied by calling me Scotch, and that's a thing I'll take from no man when I've the drink in me.

So I just telled him who I considered his mother might be, and we had it out there and then in the street. Gosh, but yon was a fight! We'd a crowd round us of men, and bairns, and bare-foot women forty deep, and they'd let neither me nor the bobby use the boot-toe. We just fought it out with the naked fists, and at last he went down whack on the paving-stones, and stayed there. I wanted to stop and preach over his prostrate corpus—I do get a bit argumentative at those times—but the crowd were kindly, and hustled me off out of mischief's way; and somehow or other I got to my lodging.

It must have been a dozen hours later when I woke; but there was the fellow's helmet to remind me of my entertainment; and it didn't take much thinking to know it would be healthiest for me to clear in a big hurry. They value their police in Liverpool, and make them expensive to crumple up; I'd found that out before. And besides, if I was caught, even if they did give me the option (which was unlikely), cleaned pockets will pay no fine. So I just slipped away without ostentation by ways I knew, and before two more hours were over I was travelling down Liverpool river in a Dutchman's stoke-hold.

It was she that dropped me in Hamburg, and I'd have liked much to have spent a night or so up at San Pauli just for the sake of old times. But it couldn't be done. I was cleaned out, and I had just to take the handiest berth that offered, and that was fourth on the *Stuttgart*. I was as good a man as her second or third, or for that matter as

good as her chief. But I didn't grumble. I was glad enough to get any engineer rating. It was luck I didn't have to sign on as fireman for a second time.

Of course you'll say I ought to be ashamed of myself for shipping on a Dutchman at all ; and I will own up that the mess-room grub was bad enough to poison a Krooboy ; but you see I'd that Liverpool bobby always at the back of my mind, and I didn't want to be fetched home again, and shamed, and put to do time in the jug. I may tell you straight that for all I've been a roughish party now and then, I'd always my pride ready to hand. I never could forget that I'd come of decent people, and that my father had once been such a respected minister of the Free Kirk of Scotland.

The *Stuttgart's* engines were, as I've said, triple expansion, and when I got to handling them I gained respect. All the other officers down there were Dutchmen, but I will say they treated me like a gentleman, and saw I knew my job. They all spoke English too ; these foreigners have to, with such beastly languages of their own ; and they were glad enough to listen to me whenever I chose to talk.

I never could make out though whether they were very plucky or very ignorant. The state of the *Stuttgart* never seemed to affect them at all, and there was no doubt but what she was a terror. I've sailed in some baddish wrecks in my time, but this *Stuttgart* was 'way ahead of all of them. Two boilers and the engines were the only new

things about her, and you wondered how everything else held together. Every second plate had concrete over the rivets, and you could crumble most of the frames into rust scales with your fingers. We picked up dirty weather as soon as we had dropped our Elbe pilot, and the way she buckled and squealed and clattered was a caution. With a head sea we hardly dare do more than give her just headway. If she'd raced badly, the propeller would have shaken the stern frames clean out of her. And she leaked too. We'd to keep one bilge-pump running watch and watch if we didn't want to have water washing over our foot-plates.

I can tell you I didn't like it at all, and off the Forelands I said so to the chief in pretty squarish words.

He shrugged his shoulders regular Dutch fashion. 'She is an illusdration of cutting dze exbenses,' says he. 'You will soon get used to her, Herr McTodd. She only wants a bid of nursing. This is dze way we Chermans make money. We buy dze ships from you Britishers after you done mit dem, und den we r-run dem to big profit. Blitzen!' says he, 'what vould become of dze old sheeps if dere vas no one to buy dem after dey vas too shlow for your r-rush-ahead freights, und too seek for your old-frau Board of Drade?'

'The Board of Trade is a fool,' said I. 'I'm with you there.'

'Dey vas not yet fit for der sheep-breaker, Herr McTodd,' says he. 'Dere is profit still to be made from dem, und we Chermans do it—mit cutting dze exbenses.'

‘You’ll cut a bit too deep, and slit your own throat as well, if you don’t mind.’

‘Ach, no,’ says he. ‘We Chermans take good care of ourselves always. Joost throttle her down half a turn, Herr Mac. She was beginning to race badly some more in dese pig-seas of your Channel.’

Well, of course, that was their way of looking at it, and if a lot of Dutchmen do get drowned, it’s their own look out, and nobody very much misses them. But for myself, if I’ve got to sail in wrecks like this *Stuttgart* I like to have extra pay to square up the risk, and that’s a thing these Dutchmen don’t see at all. However, as you know, I wasn’t there quite by my own choice, so I made up my mind to go across with her to Buenos Ayres, and then run if anything in the way of a snigger berth offered itself.

But in the meanwhile we’d got to get there, and that was a longish job. There’s one thing about these Dutch vessels, you’re not expected to drive them like you are English boats; to-morrow’s as good as to-day; and as long as you’re there on watch, they don’t ask you to keep your firemen and trimmers everlastingly on the hop. They use that beastly patent brick coal, and it’s stuff that only makes steam deliberately.

We were only making short passages to begin with; we wanted passengers and cargo both; and we’d to look in at six French and Spanish ports to get them. Corunna was our last place of call. We’d some two thousand demijohns of Hamburg *aguardiente* to put ashore there, and some ninety tons of cargo and ninety greasy Spaniards to take

on board. It was a six hour job at the most, but we took two mortal days to do it. Lord! I would have made the lazy beggars bump themselves if I'd been skipper! And then we made our final clearance. There were four hundred and three souls on board the *Stuttgart* when she let go her warps that afternoon, and only two of us were ever to smell land again. It's a bit awful when you think about it.

It was dark and breezing up when we cleared Corunna harbour, and outside there was an ugly run of sea ready waiting for us. There was a noise about the ship that struck me like a dirge: there were three hundred and fifty passengers, all poor folk emigrating, and all moaning with seasickness; and the old steamer herself, straining in the seas, was filled with groans from every part of her, as though she had been a live thing in mortal pain from the wrenches.

The night came away thick as a hedge with spindrift and driving rain, and news got down to the engine-room that we'd missed a homeward-bound P. and O. by a short fathom, and that her officers had been cursing blue lightnings off their upper-bridge.

That was off Finisterre. But the blow shifted round a point or two more to the southward when we'd rounded the Cape, and when we got the full weight of it, we in the engine-room had too many duties of our own to think of to leave time for worry about what was the business of those on deck. You see with that enormous head sea, the propeller was out of water half its time, and we just had to throttle her down. If she'd raced

badly the whole thing would have been U.P. in a couple of minutes. Even as it was, giving her about one-quarter steam, you'd have thought that the engines would have jumped clear of their bed-plates when the propeller rose into the wind over the back of a sea.

At every heave scummy black water swilled knee high over our foot-plates, and although both bilge-pumps were clacking away for all they were worth, it was all they could do to keep it under. She leaked everywhere. There was a weep round every plate, the rivets kept perpetually dropping out of her ; and every time she shipped it green over the decks, it came down through our skylights and through the fiddley in regular cascades. There was no doubt it was a devil of a night, and equally small doubt it was no weather for the *Stuttgart*. Even the old chief owned that. 'It looks,' I heard him say, 'as though dey'd cut dze exbenses a bid too fine dis drip.'

'I take it,' said I, 'that this ship-load of people is off to hell very quick. There's one thing, though : they'll stoke up fires there ready against when the directors of your company come down to join them.'

'Dose diregtors vas to blame, Herr Mac, and dot's a fact,' says the chief. 'Dey haf been too hungry after deir profits.' He had his ear at the bridge speaking-tube. 'Herr Gott !' says he, 'here's der Ole Man saying she hasn't weigh enough for him to keeb her head on to der gory seas. If I give her more steam it vill jump dze engines right outside of herself.' He shouted

back an answer, and went off to oil the eccentric bands. I didn't expect to live the night through, and I don't think anybody else in the engine-room did either, but we went on with the work for all that as though nothing was happening. I will say that for those Dutch engineers: they didn't show funk. But routine's a great thing.

All this time the water in her had been getting worse. Whiles we'd be dry when she rolled her other bilge down the hill, and whiles we'd have a regular sea swilling about us, hip-deep, with a scum to it of oil and coal-dust that left ridges on our clothes as it ebbed, like you see on a river bank after spate-water's fallen. The place was full of steam, too, from the swill slopping against the boiler fires, and our lights showed through it dimly, like street-lamps in a fog.

As I say, the water got deeper in our engine-room, and the bilge-pumps might have been standing for all the good they seemed to do; the pressure was running down, too, in the gauges because the fires were getting swamped; but I think it was a bit of an accident from outside that gave her the final quietus. We felt the numb of a shock—not much, you know, but just enough to swear by; and the cold water deepened around us by inches to the minute. I think she must have struck some floating wreckage; blundered on to it as like as not with her broadside; and it was too much for her. A stouter ship would have heeded nothing a knock like that, but the *Stuttgart* was old and frail, and she started a plate, and then it was sea-floor for her and no excuse.

The bulk-heads were as useful as so much paper.

Well, one might as well be drowned where one was, as cut in the cold wet gale on deck, so when the chief and the others went up the ladder, I stayed. I climbed to the mid-platform and put my back against a warm oil standard. There's a companionship about engines, and besides, if God sees you peg-out sticking to the work you're paid for, I've a notion He won't forget it when He's squaring up His account-book.

The engines died hard. Some one from the bridge telegraphed for 'Full Speed,' and I opened the throttle, and they jumped ahead like live things. It didn't matter what they carried away then; but all held, and the spurt didn't last for long. They slowed as though they were sick, poor beggars; they'd not fifty pound of steam left to live upon; and then they took to stopping on the turn. It made me wet-eyed to think about them, fine triple-expansions like those, thrown away in a rotten hull like the *Stuttgart's*.

Then some one flung open the door above, and bawled down: 'Hey, Mac, are you below there?'

'Ay, ay, sir,' said I.

'Then quit that engine-room you d—d fool, and come out on deck and get drowned like a Christian.'

I never found out who gave that order, but I did as I was bidden. The engines, poor things, were as good as dead already. Mortal man would never handle valve again on them till all the seas were drained.

The torment of the *Stuttgart* would have ranked as bad in hell. She rolled in the trough as helpless as a crazy drain-pipe, and you wondered why she did not turn the turtle altogether. First one covering board squelched fathoms deep in the sea, and then the other swooped down to an even greater depth. The emigrants inside her lay sick in their bunks, and drowned there like rats in the noisy dark. The ship had boats in abundance when she left the Elbe, but if you ask me where they were then, I could not say. The seas were making a clean breach over her. And such seas they were too, I've never seen the like of. They were no ordinary waves. They were great green mountains of water that hit down upon the decks like earthquakes. No vessel built of man could have long withstood that pounding; and the *Stuttgart* was wearily old, and long overdue to meet her end.

Bridge, boats, skylights, and rail were all over the side when first I came on deck; and as I lay there hanging on to a stanchion stump, I knew that more was swept away every time the tearing seas sluiced across her fabric. But I could see nothing in detail; all lights were out by then; all was inky blackness, and beating water, and ponderous bellowing noise. It was horrible to have to die helpless in the peopled dark like that.

If I'd been one of those writing fellows, I could have put down a lot about how the Old Man and his officers acted, and how attempts were made to save the passengers, and all that, the same as you read in a slap-up evening newspaper. But as it is

I can't write anything of value. I saw nothing ; it was all dark, cold, and numbing ; and no orders could have been heard, even if any were given ; and for the matter of that I didn't see anyone to carry them out. I haven't imagination like those clever writing chaps : I can't write down an account of what might have happened : I haven't it in me. I hung on to that stanchion for it might have been two hours—though I wouldn't swear it was above two minutes—and then the deck seemed to break up beneath me, and I found myself soused over ears in the sea.

I tried to drown and could not. The spirit was willing, but the swimming instinct was strong in me. I trod water, breathed the wet air, and cursed myself for being weak enough to let the agony be prolonged. I shouted aloud into the storm that I was done with life, that death might have me when it wished ; and then something grey and solid loomed out through the blackness. It was one of the *Stuttgart's* lifeboats. She was riding keel uppermost. My knuckles scraped against her side.

I worked round, hooked a finger into one of her rudder gudgeons, and so rested ; and presently when a wave righted her, I clambered inside over the stern sheets. The oars were made fast along the thwarts. I slipped one from the lashing and passed it through the grummet on the stern post. She was full of water and very unhandy, but I got her round head to sea, and that saved her from capsizing again.

At that moment a queer thing happened. The

syren of the *Stuttgart* gave a preliminary cough to get the water out of the pipe, and then it went *whoop-a-doodle-doo!* for all the world like a Thames tug-boat larking down the river with excursionists.

I turned round and stared. I could just make out the loom of her faintly through the blackness. She tried another crow, but it was very faint, and she only got half through with it when up went her stem in the air with the water pouring off it in wild cascades. The stern dipped beneath the sea. Then a wave reared up ahead of me and blocked out all view, and when my boat had ridden over it the steamer was gone. There was nothing around me but huge black waves, roaring and leaping, against a darker blackness.

I bawled out any words which came to my mouth. I wanted company; and if anyone still floated and lived, I hoped the shouts would draw them to the lifeboat. I didn't expect to live out the gale (although you can bet I wasn't going to give up till I was forced); but when it came to dying, I wanted some one to die with me, even if it was only a Dutchman. A man never knows what loneliness really means till he's tasted times like that.

A lot of time passed—it might have been another two hours, or it might have been more, or less: I haven't much notion—and then a voice hailed me from the water. I couldn't scull the boat towards it, because with the water up to her thwarts she was about unmanageable; but I hailed back, and presently a fellow swam slowly up out

of the darkness, swooping thirty feet up and down on the waves.

He was slow in getting on board. In fact he missed a dozen chances, and I thought he was numbed with the cold. But at last I saw that he'd got a grating in tow with someone else hanging to it whom he would not desert; and, finally, when he did get hold of the gunwale, he'd the other chap's neck-scruff in his spare hand. I made shift to get them both in over the side, and there they lay like a couple of wet clouts across a thwart, with the water washing backwards and forwards over them. I couldn't help; I was up to my eyes in the steering; besides, what did it matter, as there was small chance of anything but drowning for the lot of us?

But presently the chap who had been swimming straightened himself and sat up. Day was beginning to get into the sky, and by that time we could see one another a little, and presently, says he, 'By the living powers its McTodd!'

'Hullo,' I said, 'are you English?'

'You bet,' said he. 'I was in the stoke-hold, but not in your watch. This other Johnnie is English too. He was a passenger, and third class at that. But he seems well off. He offered me a cool thou', cash down, if I'd save his life; and I've had a shy at it. He isn't much of a specimen—a runaway shopkeeper, I should think—but he was English, so I thought I'd stick to him. I suppose we three are the only ones the sea hasn't grabbed? Well, Rule Britannia! Did you hear the old *Stuttgart* give her final crow?'

‘It was loud enough.’

‘That was me. I found the whistle string lying handy, and just fired off a *cock-a-doodle-doo* like one used to on the launch on fireworks nights at Henley and those places. I tried a second crow, but she hadn’t wind enough for it, so I grabbed the shopkeeper here, and the grating, and just jumped. Much obliged to you for giving us room in the lifeboat, Mr. McTodd.’

‘You’ll have to work your passage then,’ said I, ‘or it’s no unlikely you’ll be split within the next minute or so. Get your hands to work, and scoop this water overboard.’

‘Ay, ay, sir,’ said he, and started in, and I went on straining every thew at my employment. I think the gale began to lessen a little from then onwards; but the sea was running as high as ever; and it was weary work keeping that heavy boat nose-on to it with the steering oar. But after he’d cleared the water from her nearly down to the floor gratings, my fireman found a rope in the fore locker, and made it fast to the spare oars, and threw them overboard; and in another minute we were riding snugly to a sea anchor which broke all the combers before they reached us.

‘I’m awful glad to have you,’ said I, to the fireman. ‘What might be your name?’

‘What’s it matter?’ says he. ‘Besides, I forget. No, by the way, I don’t though. I signed on as J. Vaughan. Yes, I’m John, or Jacob Vaughan, at your service, Mr. McTodd. But look here, I say, what’s wrong with trying to

pull back the shopkeeper into life again? I think I saw him stir just now.'

We took the other man from where he lay, and sat the pair of us on an after-thwart with him between to try and coax some warmth into his body. I cannot say he looked healthy. His face was grey, and all his limbs were limp. He was a little, plump, soft-handed man, of the sort that can't stand rough treatment, and the sea had washed most of the life clean out of him. He opened his eyes after a bit, and 'Where are we?' he asked.

'Open-boat cruising somewhere off the Portuguese coast,' says Vaughan, 'and I'm sure I hope you like it.'

'Yes, but where am I?' he says again, feebly.

'If you want to know your personal position,' said Vaughan, 'I should say you were very near hell.'

That seemed to wake him, and he stared at the tearing seas with wild round eyes, and seemed to remember. 'Shall we be saved?' he asked.

'We aren't drowned yet,' says Vaughan. 'But whether we shall get to the dry mud again is more than I can say. By the way, you owe me a thousand pounds.'

'What for?'

'Services rendered. If you don't pay it, I've a strong mind to put you back in the water again. I fancy you're a bit of a Jonah.'

The man shuddered. 'You know what I'm here for, then?'

'From what you let drop on the *Stuttgart* when you'd got the fear of God very near to you, I should say you are a shopkeeper of sorts absconding with some one else's money.'

'I am a bank manager, sir.'

'Same thing. I don't suppose they'll take much count of the difference when you land at the place you're going to.'

'Do you think I'm dying, then?' says the man, in a whisper.

'For that matter I wouldn't purchase the lives of any of us for much. But so far as looks go, you're the least healthy of the three.'

'It's been the cold; and my heart's bad. I came this voyage for my health.'

'Purser's name, ragged clothes, newly-shaved moustache, third class berth on a German emigrant ship,' says Vaughan, totting off the items on his fingers. 'It's the sort of way a banker would travel for the benefit of his honoured health. I guess, my son, I know precisely the kind of health you mean. You've had an affection of the chest—the money chest. Have you got the boodle on you?'

The man had sunk into a kind of torpor. Vaughan shook him, and repeated his question. 'Have you got the money on you?' he asked.

'I changed it to diamonds, and I had them strung into a necklace.'

'Left it in the *Stuttgart*?'

The man shook himself free from us, clutched his coat together with trembling fingers, and glanced from one to the other of us with wild

staring eyes. Then he toppled backwards off the thwart in a breathless faint.

‘He’s got the plunder with him in his pocket,’ said Vaughan, thoughtfully. ‘Nothing like having these things in portable shape. And he’s got a thundering sick heart in him too. I wonder if he’s *pukka* dead this time?’

I knelt on the grating beside the man, and lifted his head. ‘He’s life in him yet,’ I said. ‘Man, ye should be sweeter in your talk. Who are you to cast stones against him?’

‘He’s a banker, is he,’ says Vaughan, thoughtfully. ‘They don’t skip with sixpence ha’penny in their pockets when they do conclude to make a bolt of it. I’d like to have a look at that neck-lace. I bet it’s a beauty.’

He broke off there, and stared at the great waste of heaving water. I busied myself in attending to the banking gentleman. Day was up by this time; the floating anchor of oars broke the combers; and the lifeboat rode drily. The sun was getting into the air, too, and warming us and drying our sodden clothes. But no warmth seemed to stay in the man on the gratings. I’m a fellow that’s picked up some scrap of surgical knowledge, and it didn’t take me long to see that he was dying. Presently he opened his eyes again, and asked for the second time where he was. He spoke very weak, and I told him as softly as I could; and then, ‘Mister,’ said I, ‘if you’ve any message to give, you’d better hand it to my keeping. Vaughan and I may get ashore—at least, there’s a slender chance. But I fancy you won’t.’

'No,' he said, feebly. 'You're right. My heart's done.' And then he broke off again, and shut his eyes, and appeared to think. 'Look here,' he said, 'can I trust you?'

'No,' snaps Vaughan.

'Yes,' says I. 'My father was the most respectable man in Scotland.'

'Well I got to,' says he, with a quivering sort of sigh. He tried to lift a hand, but couldn't. 'There's an envelope in my breast pocket. I haven't strength left to get it myself. Pull it out for me, will you?'

I did that. It was a linen envelope, and the wet had not spoiled it.

'The necklace is inside there, and with it the address of my wife. If you'll take it to her she'll reward you.'

'For handing on your stolen goods?' says Vaughan.

The man squirmed on the grating. 'At least I've given my life for them,' said he. 'My wife,' he said, and raised himself on an elbow. 'My wife,' he whispered, and his grey face bent slowly back till the apple in his neck stood out like an egg. And then the rolling boat threw him off his balance, and he fell back with a sodden thud on to the grating.

I knelt and looked at him. 'He's dead enough this time,' said I.

'Dead as Julius Cæsar,' says Vaughan. 'Open the envelope, Mr. McTodd.'

'For why?' says I.

'For why? To see where you've got to take

it, to be sure. You can't read the lady's name from the outside, can you ?'

'No,' said I, 'that's right enough.' I put my thumb in the flap. The gum was wet, and it pulled open easily enough. And then I lugged out the necklace.

My certie, what a sight that was ! The stones were as big as Lima beans ! I'd never seen such stones, no, not even worn by ladies singing in the halls. The sun caught them, and the flashes they gave out were enough to make me wink.

'Gosh, man,' I said, 'you were right. It's no' sixpence ha'penny he was content with stealing. This gaud will be worth all of seven hundred pound. And I'm a bit of a judge.'

'A judge !' shouts Vaughan, 'you a judge ! You great gumph ! Seven hundred pounds ! Say seventeen thousand, and you'll be closer the mark. And God knows I can go near the price. I've bought enough of them for one woman and another. If I hadn't, I shouldn't be here. Yes, there's seventeen thousand pounds worth of gems in your hands this minute if there's a penny's worth. Why, man, that's a necklace a queen might sigh for and never get.'

'Seventeen thousand pound !' said I. 'You don't say !'

'Ay, but I do, and I've got first mortgage on it for ten hundred.'

'How's that ?'

'For salvage.'

'Well, I suppose that's right. If it hadn't been for you, the stones would have been on the sea-

floor this minute. But what do you suppose the ledgy will give me out of it?’

‘Half-a-crown and a drink of beer.’

‘But I’ll be wanting more than that.’

‘Of course you do. Any sensible man would. And I tell you how we must manage it, Mac. We must sell it ourselves, if we ever do get ashore—which, of course, is open to doubt—pocket our shares, and send on the balance.’

I shivered. ‘I’d no’ like to have the handling of a large sum like that, laddie, if it could be avoided. I—I hae my weaknesses.’

‘So have I, my faith, or do you think I’d have come down from what I was, to firing on a d—d German emigrant boat. And if you want my candid opinion of what will happen, it’s here packed small: We shall have difficulty in selling the necklace, because all dealers will take us for thieves, and we shall have to get rid of it on the quiet. We shall get about half value for it, and then we shall start in on a gorgeous spree, and never stop till we’ve spent the last cent.’

‘Man,’ I said with a sigh, ‘I believe you’re right.’

‘I know I am. We’re not fit to touch the thing, either of us. And we’d be doing wrong in giving it to the man’s wife. It’s stolen, and she’s no right to it. And, to be short, I don’t want to have any further truck with it at all. I’ve been most kinds of blackguard since I left Oxford, but I’ve not been the thieving variety up to date, and I don’t particularly want to be tempted into it. Look you, Mac, lend me the necklace, and I’ll show you a trick of honesty with it.’

He took it from my fingers. He swung it to and fro between him and the sun, filling his eyes with the colours of it ; and then he heaved it high into the windy air as far as his arm could fling. We never saw the necklace touch the water. A great hill of green leaped up and hid it whilst yet it was in the air.

‘Seventeen thousand pounds,’ I said, ‘seventeen thousand ! Man, it’s an awful pity.’

He busied himself by getting the lugsail halliards rove, and the mast stepped.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘we’re honest yet.’

‘Indifferently so,’ says he. ‘Bear a hand, Mac, and ship that steering oar of yours again. The sea’s going down, and we must risk it. Anyway if we stay here we shall starve. I’ve snugged this lugsail down to the last reef.’

He handed aft the sheet, manned the halliards, and mast-headed the lug. Then he went forward, and with his knife sawed through the rope to which we rode to the sea anchor.

I gave her helm, whaler fashion ; the sail slatted and filled and drew : and the lifeboat swung round in a pother of foam. The brown hills of Portugal showed warmly across five miles of tearing water on the starboard hand, but I dared not bring the lifeboat on the wind. With that terrible sea that was still running she would not have lived a minute. Even in rounding her she had filled again very nearly to the thwarts. There was nothing for it except to run, and edge in slowly. And that is what we did.

The fireman baled. Only once in four

wet, boisterous hours did he look up from his work.

‘Seventeen blooming thousand pounds!’ says he. ‘Think of it, McTodd. We could have offered much fine incense to the devil with that, my lad.’

‘Dinna mock,’ I said, ‘on this lonely sea. The Almighty’s got no one else to listen to out here, and He’s giving us both ears.’

‘You’re right,’ he said; ‘I won’t. I’m feeling d—d virtuous just now, and it won’t do to spoil the effect. Seventeen thousand pounds! Supposing I’d got, say, five thou’ as my share. I could have gone back with that, and seen London again, and the girls, and oh Lord! oh Lord—!’ And there he broke off and went on with his baling.

We were drawing nearer all this time to the coast line, for I was edging her in all I dared, and we could see the surf spouting up along the beach in fountains that gleamed in the sunlight. The lifeboat leaped like a live thing amongst the waves, and the dead man stared at me open-eyed, as he toppled about stiffly on the gratings.

To try and run her through those breakers seemed madness, but to stay at sea meant starvation, not to mention that any moment a wrong move with the steering oar might see us capsized. The tongue was glued in my mouth with thirst, and I could not talk; but I beckoned my wishes to Vaughan, and he nodded assent.

We were only a quarter of a mile then from the beach, and I put the boat squarely for it.

Vaughan layed aft and flattened in the sheet, and she slid over the seas like a racing yacht. It made you tingle all over to feel the way she moved. She took the first comber like a jumping horse, and then swirled on in a lake of yeasty broken water. But the crest had filled her to the thwarts, and she had lost her weigh, and the next roller span her round like an empty bottle. Vaughan and I jumped for it on either side, like a pair of frogs, and then it was each for himself. We never saw trace of either boat or dead man afterwards.

It was no the first time I've swam in through a bad surf, and I managed it, though it was touch and go, and I landed with the breath nearly knocked out of my body for good and always. But Vaughan was there before me. He'd got a cut over the head from a floating oar, but he didn't seem to mind that. He'd seen a stream trickling down the cliffs beyond the beach, and he was running for that with all the pace of his heels.

I followed slower, and put my face in the cool, sweet water, and we drank both of us till we were well-nigh fit to burst. And then we sat down on the moist green moss beside it.

'It's a merciful escape,' said I.

''Tis,' said he. 'You've got that envelope with that woman's name in it?'

'I have it.'

'Then tear the thing small, and throw it away.'

'What for?'

'Because it can do no good, and it may do harm. You don't want to go and call on her, I suppose, and say you know her husband was a thief, and that he gave you a necklace to carry home, and you haven't got it?'

'I should have no sort of a tale to tell.'

'Do the kindest thing, Mac, and let him slip out of memory. It's a chance we bad eggs don't always get. Here am I, now. My people will find out that I shipped in the *Stuttgart*, and that she's foundered. At home I've been a nuisance to myself, and a terror to my friends. But I've got here a chance to wipe the old slate and start fresh. You only know me under a purser's name, so you couldn't give me away if you wished. But I suppose you'll go and give evidence before some sort of Enquiry Board, and I do ask you as a favour to say you are the only one saved. Then I can't be traced.'

'But, man,' said I, 'yon would be lieing.'

'In a good cause, Mac.'

'I'll save my conscience,' said I, drily enough. 'I'll no' go near any Courts of Enquiry at all. I'd a sma' difficulty with the police in Liverpool a few weeks back, and it would suit me well if I was no' heard of for awhile. So, if it's all the same to you, laddie, we'll just keep dark, and let it be thought that the old *Stuttgart* carried all hands with her when she took yon fearsome dive.'

We shook hands on that, and went into the country at the back and made a meal off prickly pears. And then, after a sleep, we parted, and I've

never seen or heard of Vaughan since. For myself, I got employment during the next few weeks in a beet-sugar mill. And when next I found myself in a seaport town, the sinking of the *Stuttgart* had lost its freshness.

CHAPTER V

THE WAR OF THE QUAH JU-JU

I WAS accountable for those fire-bars, and that is how the trouble arose. I was chief engineer, you see, and although Captain Debbs was the only other white officer the little *M'wara* had on board, I had all the responsibilities of the chief of a 9000-ton Cunarder. I'd my stores checked when I took over command ; and I'd to make up an indent of what was expended between each round trip from Sarry Leone ; and if there was any extravagance, it was me and not Debbs that would get the blame.

I'll own we were doing a roaring business with passenger-boys ; we took them up or set them down at every place we stopped at ; the decks of the *M'wara* were full of them ; and they made the little steamboat smell like a Glasgow tram-stable. But they'd got a knack of dying which we couldn't hinder. Fever knocked them over, and dysentery ; they'd yaws, and they'd beri-beri, and others of the plagues of Africa which we white men have no name for ; and some, I do believe, died for no other reason but just to stir up trouble between Debbs and me.

You see, Captain Debbs was great on funerals. He was a member of some fancy new sect which had got a mission in Sarry Leone, and he believed that if he could get in a funeral service over a dead nigger, and have him sent over the side with a couple of fire-bars made fast to his shins, he'd grabbed that nigger as a *bond fide* convert. It would have been no use arguing with the man : he was clean convinced. And, as a matter of fact, I didn't argue ; but I forbade my fellows down in the stoke-hold to let him have a free run of those fire-bars. One fire-bar is enough to sink any dead nigger with decency, and more is sheer lavish extravagance. Two's luxury only fit for a white man.

But Captain Debbs was not the man to give up his position without words ; and, moreover, he was new to the Coast, and only knew the black man from what he'd learnt through tracts and missionary books at home. Says he, 'Mr. McTodd, they're my brothers.'

'Weel,' said I, 'if ye say they're your brothers, I'll no' be rude enough for to deny it. You English have some queer connections. But they're no relatives of mine. I'm Scottish mysel'.'

For that he knocked me down, but I pulled him to the deck also, and pummelled him so that it was two days before he got back his senses again. It was me and the Krooboys that took the *M'wara* back into Freetown ; and it was me the owners sacked the moment I stepped ashore. But I know for a fact that Debbs was stopped his game with the fire-bars from then onwards. Each dead

nigger got his proper whack of one fire-bar, neither more nor less, and I take credit for having preserved the rule of the Coast.

Now what I did for the next six months in Sarry Leone is a matter of my own concern, and I do not care to publish it in these present memoirs. I was not making a fortune just then, and if I did not starve, it was because white men in a West African colony do not care to let the niggers rejoice by seeing another white man go hungry. But the next piece of remunerative occupation which I found—and it caused me to sign on again as chief engineer of the *M'wara*—was a surprise even to myself. Indeed, if anyone, before I found the job, had told me that I, the son of the most highly respected minister in the Free Kirk of Scotland, would ever imperil my life for the safety of a heathen idol, I should have said straight out that he lied. And if any one had added that I should be lugged into the business through sheer liking for a young woman who was not even white, I should have said that not only did he lie also, but he'd a very poor acquaintance with the methods of Neil Angus McTodd.

The young woman's name was Laura Cameron, and I came to know her through her father, who kept a store on the Kissy Road. It was he that approached me about the business first, and I let him know straight that he'd got hold of the wrong man. He'd the sense not to push me too hard. 'Maybe you'd like time to think it over, sar?' says he.

'No,' said I. 'Palaver set.'

‘Very well, sar,’ says he, with a sigh, ‘palaver set. And now, sar, I ask you to come into house, an’ my daughtah shall swizzle you cocktail. Perhaps you will stay for chop afterwards?’

‘Right-O,’ said I, and stepped through the back of the shop.

The old man was a mulatto, in colour like a ginger-bread cake; and he talked ordinary Coast-English. The daughter (I was a good deal surprised to find) was many shades lighter. In fact, she was as white to look at as myself, with hair that wasn’t even kinky, and pink colour to her cheeks, and a figure as good as any lady’s you could see on the stage. And if I’d met her in England, and not known who she was, I’d not have cared to speak, she’d that much manner about her. But knowing she was only a nigger, of course I was just as free with her as I should be with you, and sat down on the table, and called her ‘my dear’ from the very start.

But she was not one to take liberties with, though. She had been to parties, and danced with officers of the West India Regiment, and she had a full opinion of her own looks and responsibilities. And because it wasn’t as easy to get on with her as with some, I think I liked her all the more. She’d been in England to school, and could play the harmonium, and speak French, and do geography. There were plates, hand-painted by herself, hung on the whitewashed wall of their sitting-room. And she’d a school friend that had stayed near Ballindrochater throughout one holiday. It was plain that she was splendidly educated.

She invited me to have a third cocktail, but I know my weakness, and refused. And then we went out on to the verandah at the back, and took fans and chairs, and talked. I don't know when I've been so struck on a young woman in so short a time.

I stayed on to tea, but her father didn't come in, and she and I had it together. A regular slap-up tea it was too: none of your common native chop; but tinned salmon, and marmalade, and pickles, same as you might have here at home. It was the most Christian blow-out I'd had in Sarry Leone.

After tea we went out to the verandah again, and one of the chairs was gone. I sat me down, and invited her to my knee, and after a bit of a pout she came. It was moonlight and quite cool, and we didn't even have to fan. She gave me a good black Canary cigar, and lit it with her own pretty fingers, and I tell you I felt as comfortable a man as any in Africa.

Presently she leans her head against mine, and 'Mr. McTodd,' says she, 'would you do me a service?'

'I'm no' a very affluent man just now,' said I, 'but anything you ask, my dear, shall have my best consideration.'

'I do not want you to buy me anything,' says she, with a little shake to my arm. 'I want you to do something that will bring in money to yourself.'

'I'm no' one of those that despises siller.'

'You can have back your old berth on the

M'wara if you'll do as I wish, and have fifty pounds above and beyond your pay.'

'But the *M'wara's* going up to the Quah River to-morrow to take soldiers for a bit of a war there. I heard as much down at Gibraltar wharf to-day. Debbs is still skipper, and the owners would never let me go aboard again whilst Debbs is there.'

'Mr. McTodd, I know all that. But you're wrong in one thing. The owners will give you back your old berth as chief if I wish it.'

'Weel, if you can work it, my dear——'

'I can and will, if you promise to do for me what I ask.'

'And what might that be?'

She put her lips close to my ear. 'Neil, darling,' she whispers, 'I want the Quah *ju-ju*.'

I took a long pull at the cigar. 'That'll be the big idol the war's all about?' said I.

'It isn't very big, Neil. You could carry it under one arm.'

'I shouldn't like to try. It's a foul thing they make human sacrifices to, isn't it?'

She drew herself away from my shoulder. 'Oh, I've heard some such tale. But if you're frightened, Mr. McTodd, I needn't bother you any more.'

'It's curious,' said I, 'but your dad was pumping me on the self-same subject. Only he offered me five-and-twenty pound instead of fifty if I could set the idol down in his shop.'

'Father's very anxious to get it, I know.'

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That's why I'm anxious, just for his sake. That's why I offered so much money.'

'Ye'll have tried your hand on Debbs?' I said at a venture.

'Captain Debbs, he mission-man,' says she, dropping into the native phrase.

'And I make no doubt you've also tried the officer commanding the West India troops?' I said at another venture.

She drew away from my knee and stood up before me in the moonlight. I saw that her face was flushed. Her fingers clenched and worked. 'Mr. McTodd,' says she, 'I do not choose that you should be my inquisitor. This evening you have expressed admiration for me, and offered, if the chance came in your way, to do me service. I ask you a little thing, and at once you fail me. Oh,' she cried, wringing her hands, 'why aren't I white? Then I could have fifty men who'd jump to do as I wish.'

'You are white to look at,' I said. 'You're whiter in skin than myself.'

'But not in blood, and you know it, and take advantage of my colour. You white men are brutes. You think that all who are not born as yourselves are merely sent into the world to make you ease or sport!'

Weel, yon was quite true, but it did not make me feel in any the better conceit of myself for all that. I bit hard on to the Canary cigar, and stared out at the shadow of a palm-tree thrown black across the garden soil by the moonlight. It didn't seem that I'd anything left to say. The

girl leaned up against one of the verandah posts, and I saw her bosom heaving. Her eyes shone bright with tears in the moon. 'Oh, Neil—Neil,' I heard her say in sort of whispering sobs, 'I didn't think you could be cruel to me like the others.'

I got up and clapped an arm round her. I thought it was only right. 'My dear,' I said, 'what do you want this idol for?'

'What does it matter?' says she, miserably. 'You don't care.'

'You'd better tell me, and then maybe I can help.'

'My father has a commission to buy up native curiosities for a gentleman in England who is making a collection.'

I hugged her to me. 'You'd found it easier to have told me before, my dear. I thought, from what your dad hinted, it was for something else. You shall have the ugly thing so soon as ever I can come back with it, if you can fix me up that berth on the *M'wara*.'

'Oh, that's simple. I have influence with the owners. But how can I be sure you will get the *ju-ju* for me?'

'Because I tell you.'

'But I am only a nigger girl, and you will think nothing of breaking your word to me.'

I took a long breath and lied bravely. I could do no less. You'd have lied yourself, if you'd been there with that girl snuggling close to you under the moonshine. 'Laura Cameron,' I said, 'I look upon you as white as a governor of

Sorry Leone. I look upon you as white as myself.'

She thanked me with a squeeze. 'But the *ju-ju* will be very hard to get,' says she. 'If you let the soldier officers know anything about it they will stop you at once.'

'Oh, those swine are always on the loot for themselves. Catch me talking.'

'And the Quah tribes are very savage. You will not find it easy to take the *ju-ju* from them.'

'I'm no' quite a lamb mysel', said I, 'when it comes to pagan niggers standing in the way of what I want. Will you seal the bargain?'

'How can I do that, Neil?' says she, with a blush.

'A kiss would make it safer than a charter-party stamp,' said I, and there and then we pledged the contract. I'd have married that girl out of hand that very day if I'd seen my way to setting up a household. But I hadn't a shilling in my pocket; I'd to go to sea and earn more; and so it was no use saying what I'd in my mind. Eh, well, there are times when a man can look back upon poverty and ken it's been a useful thing to him.

The *M'wara* was standing out past the white lighthouse on the point, and threading her way amongst the shoals. Freetown was out of sight behind a green, wooded shoulder, though a building or two showed amongst the trees higher up on the mountain. Far away on the starboard

hand was the low, swampy Bullom shore, and ahead was the open sea, glittering like diamonds in the sunlight. We'd two hundred black soldiers of the West India Regiment on board, with machine guns, and grub, and ammunition cases, and all their other truck; and they didn't leave much standing room. The *Mwara* was only eighty tons. If she'd been bigger she'd not have had an uncertificated engineer for chief, and the only white man below deck.

I was standing in my engine-room door to get a breath of air, and have a think. And as I watched the wooded shores slip by, with the breakers creaming right up amongst the tree roots, I can't say that the situation altogether pleased me. I had gone to the office, as directed, and seen the owners, and asked to be put back in my old berth, just as Laura had told me. They gave me the billet without a warning; they fired out another man then and there to make it vacant; and they looked upon me whilst the business was being done as though I was some strange animal in a show. I took it all with an easy face; I didn't turn a hair; I could keep a brazen look on me before the provost of Edinburgh; but I didn't feel comfortable for all that. It looked as if there was some biggish influence being brought to bear for the sake of a mere native curiosity. The thing didn't seem proportionate somehow, and I heard the Camerons' name whispered about the office in a way which told me they were more considerable people than I had guessed.

Yet there was one thing certain: whoever was

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in at the back of the matter, Debbs was not. Debbs had met me at the head of the gangway when I came on board, and 'By thunder!' says he. 'It's McTodd! Is it you they've sacked my last chief for? By thunder!' says he, 'you aren't fit to finger a lump of waste that man's wiped his nose with.'

'You're wearing my marks on your face yet,' said I, 'and if you don't carry a civil tongue, I'll give you one or two more to add to the collection.'

'You don't appear to have grown another tooth,' says he, 'in place of that one I unbent.'

'I left the gap to remind me of you and your ways,' said I. 'How's the funeral trade?' I said, for I knew that would touch him.

He didn't trust himself to speak. He turned away, and I make no doubt gave his own tale of myself to the soldier officers, for excepting on the baldest of duty matters, no further word did I have with either them or him till the *M'wara* got back again to her anchorage off Freetown, Sarry Leone.

It suited me very well; and though probably Debbs was pleased enough to mess in the cabin, it's nothing in my line to have to wash up and dress, just to sit down and be uncomfortable with a lot of swells. So I just used to chop alone in my room; and I preferred much to do without company, rather than be sawneying in with that sort.

It took us a two days' run down to the mouth of the Quah River, and we had to hang off twenty-four hours more because a bad sea was running on

the bar, and we should have been swamped if we'd tried to cross it. As it was, we bumped pretty bad in going in, and had the decks swept fore and aft. A native pilot came off to take us up the river, for Quah Town was some thirty-eight or forty miles above the mouth. It seems we were wanted in a hurry. The Quahmen had got their tails up again, the three European factories were in a state of siege, and the whites in them were scared out of their lives.

All was hurry then, you can bet. The soldier officers were full of fight, and it was 'Push along that coffee-mill of yours, Mr. McTodd,' twenty times a day. But twice the nigger pilot put us on a mud-bank, and we had to perch there whilst a tide fell and rose, and it took the *M'wara* nearly fifty hours to do the forty miles. The mud-banks gleamed against the wiry mangroves on the banks, the sun glared from overhead, and the beer-coloured waters of the river gave out a smell of marigolds fit to make you choke. The whole place reeked with fever, and I rolled a cigarette paper full of quinine and swallowed it every watch.

But at last we came up with the factories, and then the fun began. All the buildings had been grass-roofed, with bamboo walls, but two of them had been burnt out, and not one of them could withstand a gunshot. They'd a palisade round the whole, with sentries here and there, and they looked very warlike, and very sick, and very down on their luck. There were only ten whites, all told, and eight Portuguese, and sixty Kroo-boys; and their principal weapons were flint-lock

'trade' guns made out of gas-piping, with only cut nails and trade powder to load them with.

There was no fighting going on when we steamed up. The native town was in at the back, and there was a noise coming from it of *tom-toms*, and bits of iron clashing together, and music of that kind, that made you think of shipbuilding yards on the good old Clyde. It appeared they'd one of their 'customs' on in the native town, and that they'd captured some dozen of the factory Krooboys, and were going to sacrifice them to the *ju-ju* first, and chop them afterwards. Of course that was only natural. What else can you expect niggers to do if you stop down the slave trade? Sell if he can, and eat if he can't, is part of the black man's gospel.

Our soldier officers were very full of bustle. A wharf straddled out into the beer-coloured river from one of the factories, and Debbs (according to instructions) laid the *M'wara* squarely across its end. They got all their giddy warriors ashore, took over the defence of the place from the traders (who were glad enough to be shut of it) and prepared to fight according to book. It was edifying to watch them, and I hoped they'd give the Quah-men plenty of occupation. But for myself, I'd the business matters of Miss Laura Cameron to attend to.

Now I quite understood by this time that grabbing that idol was not the soft job it had looked in Sarry Leone. But the longer it was put off the worse it would get. And for this reason. The soldier officers were after the *ju-ju* themselves. It

was common talk of the ship that if once they got it in charge the war would end with a snap; and the Quahmen, with their king at the head of them, would come in and make submission. And besides, if the Quahmen were badly pressed by the troops, they would try and carry the *ju-iu* off to the bush, and hide it in some spot where no mortal white man could live. So anyway the longer I waited, the worse chance I would have of being successful; and if I wanted to earn that fifty pounds, it had got to be done at once. So that evening, after I got my engines cleaned down and everything made snug, I put on fresh pyjamas, lit a cigar, and went ashore.

I couldn't get any of the white men of the factories apart, as they were all too much taken up with Captain Debbs and the soldier officers. But I got hold of a Portuguese who spoke English, and I must say he treated me as quite the gentleman. He'd only trade gin and a seat in the feteesh¹ to offer, but he put them both at my disposal, and was willing to talk till his tongue dropped out. But I was not there to discuss the falling-off in the ground-nut trade, or the probabilities of next season's crop of rubber and palm-oil; and, after he'd blown off the first head of his steam on that, I clamped him down to the tune I wanted.

'You sabby dem *ju-ju* house in Quah Town?' I said.

'Sabby plenty,' says he. 'Before troubles, I used to lib for town one afternoon each week.'

'What's this "custom" they're on at now?'

¹ Retail store.

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'All-e-same cannibal palaver,' says he. 'Dey pinch twenty-a Krooboys from here, and dey kill 'em funny ways in front of *ju-ju*.'

'Chop 'em after?'

'You bet-a,' says he.

'*Ju-ju* house lib for dis side ob native town?'

'Lib for middle,' says he. 'I show you, Senhor,' says he, and lugs out a stub of pencil, and draws a chart on the whitened head of a palm-oil puncheon. The noise of the *tom-toms* from the native town came to us as he drew.

'Thank you,' said I, 'I'll remember that chart. Do they keep this blessed concert running all night through?'

'Dis which-a?'

'Dis *tom-tom* palaver.'

'Oh, "concert," yes, I sabby. No, dey stop him when dey finish deir Krooboy chop, and den dey all lib for houses to keep away from ghosts. Sabby?'

'Sabby plenty. I know their little ways. Well, my son, I lib back for steamer.'

'You no stay sleep-a here?'

'Not much,' said I. 'I lib back for my own bunk, one time. But I'll have another drink with you first to our next meeting. Here's fun.' And I lifted the squareface, and then passed it on. 'So long, old man.'

'So long-a,' said the Portuguese, and there I left him. He had told me all I wanted.

Now I understood from the first that I was in for a pretty big contract, and I made my prepara-

tions accordingly. A revolver once fired would bring the whole beehive about my ears, so that was out of the question ; a sword I couldn't use ; and a knife's a thing I've never had a liking for. There's nothing of the Dago about me. So I slipped a good heavy two and a half inch spanner into my pocket, by way of persuader, took a bottle of gin to bribe the sentry, and another for personal reference, and set off.

The *tom-toms* had stopped, and the native town was as still as death. The only sounds were the snores of the West Indian troops in the factory sheds, and the night noises from the forest on the other side of the river. There was no moon in the sky, and a scum of white mist lay twenty feet deep all over the land. I went to the gate at the further side of the palisade, and showed the sentry a bottle of squareface. 'I want to go for a stroll in the country,' said I.

'Oh, massa,' says he, 'what for?'

'My palaver,' said I. 'You hold your tongue and let me come back when I am tired, and I dash you this bottle.'

'Massa, dem bushmen plenty too bad. Dey cut your trote.'

'My palaver,' said I. 'My friend, do you want this gin?'

I couldn't see his black face in the darkness, but I saw a sudden gleam of white teeth, and pressed the bottle into his paw and got over the gate. The mist was thick as steam, but there was a good well-marked road two feet wide, and I stepped along without much fear of getting lost.

I had got the Portuguese's chart, that he drew for me on the top of the palm-oil puncheon, well fixed in my head, and knew where the turnings ought to come. There was half a mile through the forest to begin with, and my shoulders rubbed against the shrubs at the side of the road, and I got bone-drenched with the dew. It hadn't begun to get cold yet, and the night was a regular stew of heat, so I uncorked my bottle of squareface and took a nip every now and again to keep off the fever. But I didn't overdo it. I'd no wish to get noisy, when there was a town of ten thousand cannibals close handy to join in the chorus.

At the end of that half-mile I began to get amongst the houses, just the ordinary grass-roofed shanties, with walls and without, which you see in all the West Coast towns; and I can tell you I trod with niceness; and so I went on my way rejoicing, nipping gin as I went—to keep off the fever. The fever's very dangerous in these low-lying river towns, and drugs are a necessity.

At last, after five turnings to this side and that, which I took according to the chart, I came to the end of the houses, and shook hands with myself in congratulation. 'Mr. McTodd,' I said to myself, 'you are an experienced navigator. There's trees ahead of you with a path running through them. Yon'll be the "fetish grove," as they mis-call it in the English newspapers.'

There was a very bad stink coming to me through the fog, so I just refreshed again for luck and to keep off the fever, and stepped in through the trees. Forty yards brought me to the place I

wanted, and the stink there was enough to knock you down. The mist had cleared a bit, and I could see something which turned me rather sick and very sober. The Portuguese had been wrong when he said the Quahmen had chopped the Krooboy for supper that night. But he was right in saying they had killed them 'funny ways.' *Phew!*

However, those poor devils of Krooboy were not my palaver. The British Army had come to square up for them, and my business seemed to lie inside the *ju-ju* house. So I took another wee nip, and screwed up my nose, and stepped across, and walked through the doorway into the dark inside.

Be hanged if the first thing I did wasn't to trip over a fellow lying on the floor. Well, it was a silly trap to fall into, but I'd got my wits in use, and gripped him by the windpipe before he could sing out, and then brought down the spanner, *whack*, just above his port eyebrow. He lay still, and I got up.

'That's the meenister of this denomination,' thought I, and wondered if there were any more of them inside. I listened, but could hear nothing except the drumming of the insects, which on the West Coast never ceases. I listened on till I could hear my own heart thumping under my shirt; but the *ju-ju* house seemed empty. Then I scraped a match, and blew it out again quickly. I had seen what I wanted.

The idol stood on the ground in the middle of the *ju-ju* house. It was a squat little wooden mannikin, daubed white, and so badly carved you'd

think they'd set the bairns on to do it. It had bits of looking-glass for eyes, and was that indecent in build it made me blush to think about. It was a bit hard to think that a trumpery little image like that had cost, one way and another, m^an^y a thousand human lives.

However, I didn't stop to speculate much on metaphysics just then. The *ju-ju* was worth £50 to me ; I had risked my life to pay it a call ; and the memory of what had been done to those factory Krooboy's outside was a hint to get my business over and be gone, one time. So I stepped out to take it.

The ground beneath my feet felt like a roughly cobbled street, and I shivered as I trod on it. The match light had shown me that the *ju-ju* house was neatly floored with smooth human craniums. But, as I say, there was not much time for sentiment. I whipped up the image, wrapped him in the mat on which he stood, clapped him under my left arm, and made for the doorway. The *ju-ju* priest groaned as I passed him, and I felt sorry I hadn't struck harder with the spanner. A man like that is not fit to live. So I took a nip of gin to wish him confusion, and stepped out for back again.

This time the path through the wood was not empty. A nigger was coming along it, singing to keep up his spirits against the ghosts. I slipped into cover, and if he'd been wise he'd have passed me by. But no, he must needs try to see who I was, and so I had to baptize him with the spanner. I hit hard this time. I'd got those factory Kroo-

boys in mind, and, thinks I, 'If I have let off the meenister, I'll make sure of the curate whilst I have the chance.'

I got through the wood all right, but the town beyond was beginning to stir. I was getting in a mortal funk, I don't mind telling you. It made me sweat to remember how they had killed those Krooboys 'funny ways,' and I just picked up my feet and ran. The dense white mist was commencing to thin. Twice I came upon natives who stared at me agape, and I had to down them. The spanner was a beautiful tool for such a job: it was heavy, and handy, and made no glimmer of a noise.

But the place was waking round me, and before I could clear the town there was hue and cry from twenty sides. The guns began to shoot, and men with spears tailed on in the chase; but the mist helped me still, and I footed it like a frightened dog. I struck in with the spanner whenever there was a nigger's face within reach, and no one got his fingers on either me or the *ju-ju*.

Right down the forest road to the factory palisade they chased me, I leading by a matter of a dozen feet; but at the sight of that they tailed off through fear of the guns inside; and I raced up and climbed over the gate, and sat down on the mud half burst at what I'd gone through.

My friend the sentry looked at me curiously.

'Dem bushmen plenty bad man, massa.'

'You bet,' I gasped.

'You hurt wid run, massa?'

'I'll want my boilers retubed,' said I. 'Now,

look here, daddy : you keep your yam-trap shut over this, and I dash you two more bottles of squareface before steamah sails. Sabby ?'

'Sabby plenty, massa. Tank you, massa.'

I stayed on in the shadow where I was till my wind came fairly back again, and then I nodded to the sentry and slipped away without making a noise. I did not want particularly to be seen with that *ju-ju*. I'd a notion from what I'd heard, that if the soldier officers came to know where it was the thing might be taken away from me ; which would have been a pity after all the trouble it had cost, not to mention losing me £50. But, as it was, I managed to smuggle it aboard without any one being the wiser, and stowed it away in a ventilator. I'd no compunction. If the British Army wanted the *ju-ju* to end the war with, they should have gone and fetched it themselves. I guess they'd got an equal chance with me when we first moored at that factory wharf.

I swallowed a big cigarette paper full of quinine when I got back to the *M'wara*, and then turned in, and you may believe that I required no rocking. But I wasn't allowed much of a watch below. At five in the morning Debbs wanted steam. So that there should be no mistake, he came and ordered it himself.

'But,' said I, 'aren't we going to stay and bring the soldiers back ?'

'You mind your own blooming business,' says Debbs, as sour as a new apple. 'You carry out my orders, Mr. McSandy McTodd, or you'll get fired out of this packet when we touch Freetown,

and I guess you won't find the berth vacant a third time. No, by thunder !'

Debbs was trying to rile me into striking him: I saw that. Debbs hated me, and no error about it. But I was not going to please Debbs just then. I said, 'Ay, ay, sunny face,' and turned out and went below. It would suit me well enough to be gone from Quah River.

Well, we didn't have what you might call a happy family ship from that homewards. In a tornado we picked up, the Krooboy second-headman who was steering, let her broach-to and get swept, just to spite Debbs, who'd been striking him, and the *M'wara* was minus three ventilators and a surf-boat when she looked up to it again. We'd all of us touches of fever, too, from the stink of the river; and that doesn't tend to improve men's temper, or make them work any harder. But Debbs ran her into Freetown without an actual mutiny, and that night I took the *ju-ju* ashore to the Camerons' house in the Kissy Road.

The old mulatto was in the store.

'Hullo, daddy !' I said. 'You lib ?'

'Very well, tank you, sar. I hope you hab good health yo'self?'

'I am keeping my end up, daddy. Where's Laura ? In the house ?'

'She lib for bush, sar. Gone yesterday.'

'The devil she did. I've got something for her.'

'Give it to me, sar. I send it her.'

'Do you take me for a mug, daddy ? Not much. I keep what I got till she comes back.'

Well, so long,' I said. I had turned to go out of the store, when a pretty voice from behind called out 'Neil!' It was so low that I could barely hear it, but I knew that voice, and I turned like a man on a hot plate.

'You old liar,' I said to the mulatto, 'Laura's here all the time.'

He shrugged his shoulders, and I think his face went a little grey.

'Neil,' came her voice again in a whisper.

I shook my fist at the old man, nipped the *ju-ju* in its package tight under my arm, and went through into the house. It was all dark inside save for what light came in through the verandah door, but I saw her there in the shadow, and had my arm round her before you could say 'knife.' I was all hot at first, but somehow she chilled me. She seemed more pleased to finger the *ju-ju* than the man who had got it for her, and when I kissed her it was like cuddling a figure of clay. But besides all this, she seemed frightened. She kept listening, and peering through the doorways, as though she feared some one was watching her.

'Look here, my dear,' I said at last. 'What's all this about?'

'Nothing,' said she.

'Then why did you get your dad to say you had gone up country?'

'I thought it was best so,' says she with a sigh.

'I don't understand.'

'I can't explain.'

I held her to me a little tighter. 'Are you in trouble, my dear?' I asked.

‘Yes,’ says she.

‘Let me help you.’

‘You can’t. You can’t. You don’t know what I am, or you wouldn’t offer. Here’s the money—£50 in notes—take it and go.’

I pouched the notes—there was no use being silly about that. But I did not let her loose. ‘My dear,’ I said, ‘I want something else. I want you. I’ll marry you in the church to-morrow, and I can’t say fairer than that.’

She shuddered, and tried to draw away from me. ‘You’ve not thought of my colour,’ says she.

‘I’m thinking of it all the time,’ said I. ‘But I offer to marry you.’

For answer she threw her arms round my neck and covered my face with mad kisses. ‘I can’t,’ she cried; ‘oh, I can’t. I would if I dared, but I can’t. I am not a white woman, and must go the way appointed.’ She kissed me again a hundred times. ‘That’s for good-bye,’ says she, and then she slipped from my arms, and picked up the *ju-ju*, and ran out into the darkness of the garden outside.

I stood there dazed for a minute, and then I ran out into the garden after her. But I could catch no sight even of her dress. I searched on and searched on, and at last I found something else, and that was three Haûsa policemen. They, it seemed, were on the same errand as myself. They were hunting for Laura Cameron.

But whatever was wrong (and what it was the fellows would not say), it was plain that she and old Cameron had left the place, and presently the

Haûsas and I left also. They went back to barracks, I suppose, and I put off to the *M'wara* and turned in. I didn't see there was anything else for me to do. But I'd a weary, miserable night of it. I'd a lot of things to tell myself, and they were not all of them pleasant.

I was sent for to the office next morning, and one of the owners saw me in his private room. He shut the door carefully and bade me take a seat. 'McTodd,' said he, 'I wish to give you a bit of a warning. You were mixed up with those Camerons?'

'I kenned them, sir.'

'Quite so. Mind, I'm not wishing you to incriminate yourself; but just listen to a friendly hint. They are out of Freetown now, and where they've got to the devil only knows; and may he keep them tight. If you're cannie, you'll keep clear of them in the future, or you may get your fingers very badly burnt in a way you don't suspect. Now help yourself to a cigar, man, and get back on board. The *M'wara* leaves this afternoon for Bathurst. Don't squabble with Debbs more than you can help. Good-bye. I'm very busy.'

Weel, for the next two months I'd other matters to think about, and in the course of interviews I gave Debbs one or two marks to add to the collection on his face, and Debbs eased me of another tooth. But when we got back to Freetown again, the Quah *ju-ju* held a prominent place. The Sarry Leone papers were full of it. How the thing had got into the colony they couldn't tell; but there it was; and the bush towns were alight

with fetish worship ; and sacrifices were being made on every side ; and the high priestess of the idol was no other than our 'comely fellow-citizen, Laura Cameron, who has so unaccountably fallen away from civilisation, and gone back to the worst practices of barbarous savagery.'

I tell ye it was an awful jolt for me. I'd had more liking for that lassie, coloured though she was, than I care to think about now.

Weel, weel.

But did I mention, I pouched yon £50?

CHAPTER VI

THE COLD-WATER PROPHET

I WANT it to be clearly understood from the start that I was born in a position of some gentility. I know that the accounts which appear in these memoirs show me most frequently in subordinate situations, but that has nothing to do with my breeding. I had for father one of the most respected Free Kirk ministers in Scotland ; he was the Rev. Angus McTodd, of Ballindrochater, whom everyone will remember ; and if at this moment he is not edifying large congregations in Heaven with his discourses, it is because there are over many of those English up there who cannot sit still for above three-quarters of an hour at a stretch. My mother was a McKenna, of North Uist, and it must have been from her I got my taste for the salt water, for her people have been sailormen for seven generations, and doubtless would have been engineers also if God had sent Robert Stephenson a few centuries earlier.

Let it be plainly known, too, that I blame neither of these dear folks for my leaning towards the whisky. If my father had gotten his way,

I should have followed in his steps in the ministry ; and to this end I was destined for the University at Edinburgh. But the thirst in me showed early, and I was conveniently switched off to a works on Clyde-side ; and so I'd got a good grounding in the shops before that time came when I found it healthier to be off and away to sea. They're a fine body of men, the Glasgow police, but they've an awful poor notion of sport, and with the whisky in me I was always for argument and a scrap.

So that was the way I first cruised off in an engine-room ; and once started, you know how the thirst for wandering grows. It's worse than the whisky craving.

As is mentioned earlier, south and west had been my usual directions, at first by chance, and then from choice. I could do fine with the heat, and I'd acquired a splendid knowledge of drugs to keep myself in health on sickly runs. But at last I got pushed north by something stronger than my inclinations.

It was the whisky, of course, that did it. I'd come ashore in Hull, and there's no denying that I behaved towards that town as though I'd been its Lord Mayor. I sang, and I preached, and I talked politics in the public streets, I addressed all who would listen from the Wilberforce statue, and I never grudged myself liquor when my skin wasn't too full to hold another drink. Finally there was some dispute down by the old harbour. There was a little green-painted clinker tug with steeple engines. She'd three men aboard. She'd

been new about fifty years back, and I told her people that that was about my idea of her age. As they didn't condescend to answer me on that, I just mentioned that the Board of Trade was very fond of interfering where it wasn't wanted, but that if it would order all such wrecks of engines as theirs to be put on the scrap-heap, it would justify its existence. Upon which they called me Scotch, and drunk. I told them they dared not invite me down on board. Well, they did it. And I fought through that tug from bridge to tiller, and wiped the dirty decks with the lot of them. Losh! but I was a handy man with my dukes in those days when I'd drink in me.

Well, you'll say there was nothing wrong in that; it was only a friendly turn-up, such as any one might have; and if we had been left alone it would have been all right. But one of the blessed police must needs come down and interfere. I warned him plainly that I was in no condition to take any of his lip, but he wouldn't be advised; and when we came to scrap, he tried to lift his knee to me. It was silly of him, because that's a trick no man will stand (if he doesn't happen to be downed by it), and from that on, I can tell you, I fought vicious.

At last I got home well on the point of the chin, and landed him well up against the rail; and then, before he could recover himself, I lit out again with my right, and lifted him clean over the side. As it happened, the tide in the river was nearly at the bottom of ebb, and he wasn't drowned or anything. But you know what the

old harbour at Hull is for mud and filth, and you can guess that if he did fall soft, at any rate he fell uncommon dirty. But a fat lot I cared for that. I picked up his helmet off the decks, clapped it on my own silly head, and gave a stirring discourse on the misuse of authority. There was a fine crowd by this time on the wharf and on the decks of the other shipping, because, as any one knows, a bobby showing fight draws better than the loudest brass band that ever blew, and a good congregation to listen to my words was a thing I never could resist. I suppose the taste must have come to me from my father.

But the crew of that little green-painted tug had sense if I had none, and they were gentlemen, which the police are not. My joker that I had flung overboard into the mud had found his wits a bit, and with them his whistle, and was blowing loud enough to be heard at the Paragon station. A fat lot I cared : I just brought him and his whistling in as an illustration to my discourse. The crowd liked it fine : they'd an excellent sense of humour. But, as I say, those three fellows on the tug were gentlemen, even if they didn't look it ; and they behaved as such. They fell upon me all at once, and bundled me over the side into a keel's boat that was just afloat, and somebody on the keel cast off the painter. There must be gentlemen amongst keelmen too, though I'd never been, as you might say, formally introduced to them.

Away went the boat in the swirl of the muddy river with me in the bobby's helmet preaching on

still for dear life, and the crowd cheering, and laughing, and waving hats. But the head of the drink was dying out of me now, and with only the lees left, I was beginning to see things with a more dour view. Four more big, fat police had come up on the wharf, saw their man slopping about in the mud like a filthy eel, and had begun looking round for a boat to follow in. Half an hour earlier I'd have been no man to have baulked them of their desire ; but just now, as I say, the drink was dying out in me, and I began to see that a naval action under the circumstances was a thing to be avoided. I stood with empty pockets ; and so even if the unsympathetic magistrate did give me the option, which was unlikely, I'd no money to pay a fine, and should have to see the inside of the jug.

The very idea of it seemed to put an ague on me ; however respectably you may have been brought up, there is no doubt but what being in the jug degrades one ; and I picked up the oar that was in the boat, slipped it into the notch in the stern, and started sculling her for dear life.

At first I was minded to get out into the Humber and put across for Grimsby. But then I remembered that the police have their beastly launches, and so with a sudden turn of idea, I shoved the boat in to some wooden steps on the opposite side of the old harbour river, made her fast, and nipped out.

I'd never been down there before, but a man like me that's been in most seaports from Hong-

Kong to South Shields both ways, isn't going to be boggled over a net of alleys and timber yards. I knew the bearings of the Alexandra dock, and I made for it as straight as if I'd been born on Hull waterside. That's the advantage of experience.

Another advantage of knowing how to set about things was that I got a ship to take me away from the scene of action without making any mistakes. It wouldn't have done to have asked too many questions, it wouldn't have done to have been about in the open too long. In the same way it would have been simply giving myself up to have gone to sign on any boat regularly, as the police always watch the shipping office on these occasions; and for the same reason I should have been caught if I'd tried a pierhead jump. So as it was, I spotted a boat that would be going out when the dock opened, and walked aboard of her, and went into her fireman's forecastle, and turned in.

I fancied I'd taken her measure pretty accurately. I'd seen from where I stood behind a pile of lumber, her second engineer mopping the deck with a trimmer, and says I to myself, if they do this in harbour, there'll be fine little games at sea, and none of that boat's stoke-hold crew will ever sign on for a second run in her. It seemed I was right. Other firemen came in, shoved their dunnage into a bunk, and if they were sober enough, got fetched out presently by the second engineer, and bidden turn-to. They were all a bit under the weather, and indeed were as tough a

looking crowd as one would wish to meet, and, thinks I, I am berthed with some bad companions. But that second engineer handled them like a man that was used to the society, showed a nice discrimination in leaving the worst drunks behind, and had the sense to leave me alone in the bunk after I'd shown my teeth at him once.

But for all that he was a fellow that wouldn't have been daunted by Satan, and he showed it in his words. 'My man,' he said to me, 'I'll leave you to sleep it off for a spell, but if you don't turn-to when your watch is called, I'll kick your little backbone through your little hat. So drowse on that, you fancy beggar.'

Well, the gates opened, and we worked out into the river without any of the police coming aboard to inquire for me, and now, thinks I, they'll begin to find they've got a fireman or a trimmer too many. But as it turned out, one of the men who had signed on for the stoke-hold hadn't joined, and when the watches were called, I stepped naturally into his place. The man had given the name of Smith, and I took it without objection. Fellows nearly always wear 'pursers' names' for the stoke-hold. But in our port watch they had rather overdone it; there were no less than four Smiths; and one or two tried to play the funny dog with the engineer on watch. But he soon put a stop to humour of that description. He re-labelled us Smith, Blacksmith, Whitesmith, and Macsmith, and told us that if we gave him the trouble of re-christening us again, he'd do it with a fire-slice. He was our second engineer,

and seemed to me a fine active officer. He carried the name of Stubbs.

It was a new triple-expansion, steel-built tramp I found myself on, some fifteen hundred tons burden, and I disremember her name, but that doesn't matter. She was chartered to some St. Lawrence port for timber, I think, but was going north about and had to call in at Dundee on the road. Between Hull and Dundee I had got quite my bellyfull of her. It hurt my dignity to be in the stoke-hold, for I was as competent an engineer as any man on her staff; yes, as competent as her chief, for the matter of that, in spite of all his brass edges and high-class extra certificates. But dignity was a thing I could have swallowed if I could have got down the grub, but that fairly stuck against my uvula. It was bare Board of Trade allowance, and it was fit to split the mess kid with its nastiness. You will say, why didn't we complain to the Old Man, and, if necessary, refuse duty, and, in fact, go through the regular routine? Well, that is exactly what the fireman's forecastle intended to do at Dundee, and, thinks I, this will be a shore job before the bailies, and that's no place for Mr. Neil Angus McTodd under existing circumstances. So when we came to an anchor in the river I slipped overboard at slack water, and swam ashore.

Now, I'd no money left, and my chest was in Hull where I couldn't fetch it, and so there was nothing for it but to take the first ship that offered. As it turned out there was just one, a wood-built, barque-rigged, clumsy dog of an

auxiliary steam-whaler, by name the *Gleaner*, and I'd just got to sign on for her and lump it. These whalers pay on the catch ; there's no regular wage ; and as the whaling had been bad these last few years there was no precise rush for seats. It was particularly awkward for me, too, for it had always been my custom at signing-on to arrange that my mother, who lived in very poor style at Ballindrochater, should draw my half-pay. It made me feel the worst cur in all Scotland when I wrote my name on that whaler's papers, and knew because of her son's beastly drunkenness and unthrifty habits the poor dear lady would have to suffer.

However, as I say, there was no help for it ; the choice lay between that and the jug ; and once locked up you earn nothing. So I went on board, and that very afternoon we got to sea.

It was a bit of a surprise to me to find my chief was no less a fellow than Stubbs. He had been sick of the grub on his last ship, and had run too, and mighty surprised he was to see me. 'Save us !' he rapped out, 'it's Macsmith.'

'McTodd, please.'

'Same thing. Both begin with a kilt, I guess. Blimee, but this is a bonnie ship I'm on this trip. A half-bred wind-jammer, with one whole stoker to a watch, and the only assistant engineer a fellow that never touched anything more scientific than a shovel in his life before. Well, Mr. McTodsmith, I hope you'll like the process of being taught.'

'Go civil,' I said, 'or I'll break you up small and put the bits in the ash lift.' You see, I was keeping a hold on my tongue, for it's never wise

to irritate your superior officer first go off. 'Man, you're speaking to one that's been a chief engineer in his day.'

'Chief? You! What on? Where's your ticket?'

'Well, I'll not deny she was a small boat. And I'll own up that I've not, so to speak, regularly passed the Board of Trade. You know what silly flummoxing questions they ask. I'm a practical man, Mr. Stubbs, that's what I am, brought up in the best shops on Clyde-side, and what I say is I must know more about the practical handling of engines than some fellow that's just been through a drawing office, and that's seemingly what the Board of Trade wants with its fool theoretical questions.'

'There's sense in that. A pound of practice is worth a ton of theory. I carry a chief's ticket myself, but if I had to go up for examination again, be hanged if I could pass without a fine lot of cramming. However, there's not much to strain your intellect over the engine here. There's just one simple low pressure, that was built in the year one, and never improved since. You have to stand-by to hand-lever her over the dead centre when she stops, and the boiler blows off at nineteen pounds. I've burst a steam-pipe already, and served it with kamptulicon off the pantry floor, and spun'y'n. It seems the usual habit, judging from past repairs. And the boilers show more of patches than original plates.'

'What a holy ship! How about when we get amongst the ice?'

'Oh, the ship's right enough. She's eight foot thick of solid oak in the bows of her, with iron sheathing over that, and she could sail full tilt into a granite quay wall without starting a plank or butt.'

'Well, it's a sad thing for a man like me to waste his talents on engines like those.'

'Tis,' said Stubbs, grinning. 'And there's another thing that'll be wasted on this boat-be-sprinkled old oil-fisher, Mac, and that's your powers of suction. She's a teetotal ship.'

'You don't say! Well, I prophesy disaster. Too much whisky's an awful thing, but too much the other way's worse. But I suppose they'll serve out medical comforts?'

'Oh, yes, the usual slop-chest stuff, chlorodyne, mercury lotion, and black draught. But no rum, McTodd, my lad. Captain Black's an enthusiast.'

'That's the worst kind. Well, as I was saying, it means trouble.'

A sort of cold feeling came over me, and I told Stubbs about it, but he only laughed. He'd a bit of a superior way with him, had this Stubbs, that I didn't altogether like; in fact you might say he came the chief over one at times rather offensively. So I dropped the talk then, and made up my mind to be pretty stately when he addressed me next. There are two ways of making a fellow like Stubbs respect you: one is letting him see you are better born than himself, and the other is plugging him; but I generally find that a good plugging is quickest and most safe.

However, I had not physicked and tended my constitution all those years without knowing exactly the symptoms and the remedy, and I can tell you when I heard that this *Gleaner* was a mangy, lime-juicing teetotaler, I began to pity them for the second engineer they'd shipped. I went to the cabin steward and put it to him straight. He was a little cockney. 'Mac,' he said, 'I'm as dry as yourself. Now, d'ye think that if there was a drain of drink to be got, the cabin steward would go dry?'

There was sense in that, but with the thought of what was to come, I was desperate. So I went to the Old Man, and pitched my tale at him. 'I'm not asking you for a debauch,' I said, 'but, for whisker's sake, be moderate, sir. I'm used to stimulants, and, if they're broke off too sudden, all the diseases I've been through come back to me. I'm not asking you for whisky. Give me anything with grip in it, and log it as medicine.'

Well, this Captain Black he looks at me. He was a little round man with a clean chin and a fringe of beard beneath it, that I could have pitched clear of the top-gallant rail with one hand. And then he hands me a tract. 'That's your dose, my man,' says he, 'and some day you'll thank me for giving you anything so strong. It's far more use than the beastly scorching liquor you ask for. And now, you drunken son of a dog, get away forrard with you to your room and read it, or I'll have you carried there and put in irons. Come to me for liquor would you, when you know what I am?'

You can't reason with a man who adopts an attitude like that.

We were working north under sail then, and the fires were drawn. We carried coal in the bunkers, coal in the oil-tanks, coal in bags on deck, coal everywhere; and although she'd only burn her four-and-a-half to five tons a day, full steam, you'll understand the supply was limited, and there was no chance of rebunkering. We should want every shovelful we could get once we were amongst the ice in Davis Straits, and so it was saved against then.

In big engine-rooms, such as I'd been accustomed to, with engines running, there's always a job to be found. But in this *Gleaner's* scrap-heap there was nothing to do. As Stubbs said, he was frightened to mess about with the engine when it was cold, chance everything would tumble to pieces, and when I suggested that at least we could paint her, he laughed at me. 'Paint this old coffee-grinder?' he shouted. 'It's clear you know mighty little about Dundee whalers, Mr. McTodd. They know too well the value of oil to waste any of it on paint.'

'But,' I said, 'it's linseed they mix paint with, not whale oil.'

'Oh, go and boil your head,' said Stubbs. 'There's no driving some things into a Scottie.'

He'd not a gentlemanly manner with him, hadn't Stubbs at times. But it was not mere questions of politeness that disturbed me then. I'd had no wink of sleep since leaving Hull, and my brain was beginning to reel. A little whisky would

have sent me off, or a tear of bitterly hard work ; but on this swooping, rolling, staggering whaler-barque, one was as hard to come at as the other. Out of sheer desperation and disgust at idleness, I set to work building a small organ. I knew Captain Black had a service on Sundays and hymn-singing, and here, thought I, was the present to suit him.

I'd seen the entrails of a harmonium once, as it slipped from a cargo sling and smashed when it was being lowered into a lighter at Bahia, and knew the general construction. Still, I think I must have been almost fey to have built an organ then out of the materials available on the *Gleaner*. But I did it, and turned out a finished article, two-and-a-half octaves, two reed stops, two pipe stops, swell, bellows, and all complete, working night, day, and meal-times (for I could not eat), and every few hours going up to Black and yammering for a drink. But not a drop would the Old Man part with.

'My man,' he would say, 'drugs you may have, but no liquor. This is a temperance ship, and I'm going to save every soul there is on board by total abstinence, and if you think I'm going to break my record to suit the whim of a drunken beggar of an engineer——' well, then he would swear. My whiskers ! but those teetotalers do have the pull over drinkers when it comes to swearing. There's no doubt about it, that if you want to pitch in the language hot and varied, you've got to keep sour and cold and sober to do it.

But all this, as you'll say, was doing no good to me. Sleep I could not ; I'd been six days now without shutting an eye in sleep, and my brain reeled. It's a shameful thing to say, but there is no doubt but that at the end of that time I was clean demented. I packed a chest, and put on some best clothes—it was the boatswain's chest and a harpioneer's suit, but no man who looked at the white, drawn face of me dared gainsay my wish—and then I went on deck, taking chest and organ with me. I said the situation did not agree with my tastes, and I'd thank Captain Black for a boat to give me a cast ashore.

As we were then in about 21° W., you'll understand I was clean demented. Black, it seems, was a humorous fellow, in spite of his intemperate ideas. He said I might swim home. As the barque was then about half-way between North Scotland and Cape Farewell in Greenland you'll see the humour of his observation. And then whilst I was left to wander about decks and ask for a boat, church was rigged on the quarter-deck, and service commenced.

It seems I let him get as far as the psalms—mind I do not remember what I did, being quite demented, but this is what Stubbs told me afterwards—and then I brought aft my organ, and clapped it down on deck, using the engine-room skylight for a seat. I said it was one of the last services most of those on board would ever attend this side of the golden shore, and it would have to be fully choral. Black was a rigid Free Kirker of the old sort, and hated music like poison. Even

in my madness I must have known that, for (I do not remember if I have mentioned it before) my father was one of the most highly-respected Free Kirk ministers in Scotland, and I was brought up in that persuasion.

Well, Black gave the nod to the mate and to one of the harponeers, and they came up to make me stop. But I'd a monkey-wrench handy in my jacket pocket, and swore to brain the first that touched me. They were game enough, and would have risked it, but Black said he would have no fratching on the Sabbath, and called them off. So I went on playing a Lord Mornington chant to each verse of the psalms, and Black and the crew sang them through just as though they had been in an English church. It was most unorthodox of Black.

Stubbs led the singing, and I think Stubbs did it to a certain extent in sarcasm, he being a Primitive ashore, and thinking, of course, that Black was rather worse than a Roman Catholic. Then Black went on with prayer, and I'm thinking, from what I heard, that some of his remarks were not so extemporaneous as he'd have liked the congregation to believe. He was a very vain man, was this Captain Black, about his power of conducting a service.

But the dreadful part was when it came to the sermon. Black got up and so did I. We both tried to speak, and then Black gave way, saying that he would fight with no man on the Sabbath. So I had the deck, and a free use I made of it. Mine was no sermon. It was prophecy—sheer prophecy. I was mad, you'll understand, and knew no letter

of what I was saying. But the words came from me tripping, and if most of those who were by did begin to listen with scoffing ears, they heard with dripping foreheads and a tickling scalp before I was done.

I promised the *Gleaner* a gale for that Sabbath night, a boat-steerer overboard before next morning, and a cask of vinegar stove in the bread room within the week. I said we'd be on the fishing grounds a whole two months and do nothing; we'd have a 'clean' ship at the end of that two months. And then I said we'd kill a big cow-whale, and have trouble with a Dutchman whilst we were flinching her. There'd be one ship afire, either the *Gleaner* or the Dutchman, I couldn't tell which, and one ship beset in the ice. We'd none of us see home again that Christmas.

Now, all this sounds bald enough here, because, as I say, I remember nothing of it, being a poor madman when I prophesied, and only knew what was reported to me afterwards. But they said I spoke in a manner which made all believe, and that I can well understand. With whisky in me I've a fine oratorical faculty; and when I'm needing whisky as badly as I was then it may well happen I'm still more talented. This power of tongue is a gift of birth to me. My father, the late Rev. Angus McTodd, is well remembered to this day in Ballindrochater as a man who could often come to 'seventeenthly' in his discourses, and who has been known to divide his 'word in conclusion' into no fewer than five parts, with a 'finally' to wind off with.

Anyway, it fairly knocked the intemperate prejudice out of Black. Black beckoned to the steward when I had run out of breath, and says he: 'We'll stop this Balaam. Go, draw him three fingers of rum from that kag in the lazareet. Here's the key.'

The steward had signed on as doctor—which is an officer all Greenland ships have to carry as by Board of Trade directed—and lost no opportunity of learning his trade. So it seems he had a look at the medicine chest, and learning from the handbook that bromide of potass was the nearest drug suitable for my complaint, clapped in half a handful of the crystals, and dissolved those in the rum before he gave it me.

That tumblerful went down, biting all the way, and it got to work at once. I was asleep before they lugged me down to my bunk.

Now I have put the facts plainly before you here on this paper, and I ask, is it fair a man should be held responsible for what he says when he's demented, when he has been brought to that state entirely through the narrow-mindedness of his skipper? The gale came true to date that Sunday night, and it was a dandy. It blew the old *Gleaner* pretty nearly inside out. It whisked overboard a man named Larsen, and they had to let him go, as it would have whipped the sticks over the side if they had tried to round her to.

This Larsen was rated as harponeer; but he had been boat-steerer last voyage, and that was near enough for the prophecy—I had said boat-steerer. The people got very uneasy. They were

Scotch for the most part, and untravelled, and the Scotch think a lot of this sort of thing. And then when, to top all, a vinegar cask must needs fetch way and souse about half the bread, they firmly believed that my sayings were inspired (either from above or elsewhere), and all the other prophecies would come to pass if only they were given opportunity.

Of course you'll say there was nothing in that last occurrence; an old sailor is never more pleased than when he can get more than his whack of vinegar; and the bread was none the worse; and in fact had a bit of a relish given it to boot. But it wasn't that. It was the fact that three of the second engineer's prophecies had come true hand-running, and they got it into their heads that if the voyage was gone on with, they'd see the whole blame' lot fulfilled. They'd got a real hard scare rubbed into them; they signed a round robin, with names and crosses fitted in like the spokes of a wheel round the request, asking the Old Man to put back into Dundee, or at least into Lerwick, and it's my idea that Black was as scared as any of them.

Anyway, Black sends for me aft and tells me what they'd done. 'As for those swine,' says Black, meaning the hands, 'I don't care the value of an old hat what they think. But I'd like to know myself how you did it. Man, are ye a witch?'

'I'm nothing but a very thirsty and very ashamed engineer.'

'Ay, but ye were more than that to my own hearing. Ye're a gaudy musician. Stubbs tells

me you made yon grunting organ in a time incredible for belief. He says you made it out of sheet zinc and a packing case, and cut up a pair of old oily trousers for your bellows joints.'

'I was a bit agitated then, and I worked faster than ordinary. But I'm a handy man with my fingers, handier than most engineers ye'll meet, and I make no doubt I astonished Stubbs.'

'Well, we all think that organ was no' ower cannie.'

'Be beggared to that tale. I could make another to-morrow. And it's no' you that should be blaming me for what's happened. If it wasn't for your intemperate notions I should have been the most ordinary second engineer that ever signed a register. If you'd given me a tot of rum when I asked for it, you'd have had just a second engineer and no more.'

'And as it is, I seem to have shipped a prophet. Man, I wish I'd let you just wash in rum if that's the antidote. By goats! but a prophet's an awful thing. I never rightly appreciated before what the Israelites must have been called upon to suffer in their day. But I'll just throw out this suggestion to you. Cannot ye get into another ecstasy, or whatever it's called, and reverse the prophecy? Predict us a full ship instead of a clean one, and just let drop we'll be back in Dundee by September instead of being beset.'

'My whiskers, man!' says I, beginning to lose temper, 'd'ye think I can become demented to order? Ye brought me to that condition before by your bigoted teetotalism. The only thing

likely to turn my brain again on this old wind-jammer would be unexpected kindness. Now, if instead of your beastly lime juice, you were to bid the steward serve me out a daily ration of rum——'

But I got no further than that. Black's chin went red down to his fringe of beard. 'Away with you below,' he screams up at me, 'you dissolute mechanic!'

This is the worst of an argument with your skipper. He always takes a stand on his position if you beat him with your language. I will say this for Black, though. He didn't smoke and he didn't drink. He knocked off all the ship's liquor, and carried in the slop-chest the worst tobacco that was ever made into cakes, so as to discourage smoking in others. He was a little round bit of a chap, without any special strength or activity. In fact, you'd have thought he would be the best hated and the least obeyed skipper on all the seas. But you weren't long on the *Gleaner* before you understood that what Captain Black said went. And presently you'd understand why. The man had a tongue on him that could have scorched the tar off a dock gate. I've seen an old sailor go up to him full of mutiny, and come away crumpled and crying without so much as a blow being struck. You couldn't help admiring the man's power.

He was a good seaman, too. Once we were up in the ice in Davis Straits, we got a reception sufficiently terrific to have daunted Nelson. Gale blew on the heels of gale; the pack ice slashed and

crashed and piled into hills beside us, and every now and again great bergs came cruising by as big as continents ; and when there wasn't snow there was sleet, and when for half a day the wind dropped, fog spread out like a blanket.

The *Gleaner*, like all these whalers, carried single topsails, with a patent reefing spar below the yard. She was apple-round in the bottom and the bows, and was as leewardly and awkward to handle, you'd have thought, as a pontoon or a dumb-barge. But Black put her through circus tricks as though she'd been a cutter, and it was seldom enough he rang down for steam. Our coal was limited, you'll understand. Already we'd worked out two of the oil tanks into the bunkers, and every shovelful that could be spared was to be left for emergencies. Arctic navigation is a great place for emergencies : it is mostly made up of them.

I'm not saying we didn't see whales ; we did. Davis Straits seemed to be alive with Finner whales, sleek black fellows, striped like balloons. But they were no use to us ; without tackle we might just as well have tried to harpoon earthquakes. Only Norwegians fish the Finners, and they shoot them dead with picric acid bombs from little launches, and then tow them to shore, and render them down into cow fodder and tinned beef. But right whales, which was what we were after, were like the rum ration on the *Gleaner*. They weren't there ; nor were seals ; nor were sea horses, or sea unicorns.

The crew said it was my fault, and if Captain

Black and the rest of the afterguard didn't say so in so many words, they looked it. All hands, forward and aft, were on share wages, and the tale was now that I was worse than a prophet—I was a thief. There was no satisfaction for me. I offered to take them all on singly till I'd fought through the whole crew. But they'd not gratify me. So, by way of satisfaction, I used to set down my organ in the forecastle alleyway, and play to them. I could contrive a pibroch or two and a lament on that organ that were fine—almost as good as the pipes themselves. I can tell you the music made a grand accompaniment to the crashing and grind of the ice outside and the roar of the gales overhead; and if any man said he didn't like it, why then I was perfectly willing to fight him. But on that point none of them would pleasure me.

We'd been on the fishing-grounds two long cold, windy months and had still a clean ship, and then sure enough one of the mates up in the crow's nest sings out 'a fall.'

Away went the boats. 'McTodd said we'd get a fish at the end of two months,' the fellows told one another, and they looked upon that whale as already alongside and flinched.

We weren't the only ship that had seen that little pale grey spout of fog. There was a Dutch barque from Bremen that must have sighted it as soon or earlier. Anyway her boats were away first, and there was a fine race between ours and theirs.

The boats tailed out into strings, but the two first were rowing neck and neck. Black took up

the *Gleaner* after them under sail, and as there was no work for me in the engine-room, I just went to the foreto'-gallan' crosstrees for the sake of the view. I saw the smoke as each of those two boats fired her harpoon gun, and though I shut my head about it at the time, I am free to confess here that the Dutchman got in first iron. However, they both held on, both backed out, and both hoisted the 'fast' flag. The whale sounded, and the lines sizzled away round the loggerheads, and the boats swung in together in spite of the boat-steerers—or perhaps with their help. I should judge that considerable language passed, though the *Gleaner* was too far off for me to hear. Then I saw boat-stretchers, and lances, and tail knives being used ; and then suddenly our boat shoots ahead. It was clear enough what had been done. They had cut the Dutchman's line ; and, nipping their own on the loggerhead, were towed away out of trouble at the pace of a steamer.

Well, the Dutchman took the hint from that and kept off. It was a big cow-whale we were fast to, with a small calf in convoy, and so they took the calf. The cow did for us. She sounded till she had taken out the lines of three boats, and then burst with the pressure. A fine job they had
* hauling her up again. But she was brought alongside at last, and the *Gleaner* was fetched into the lee of a floe, and made fast there to her ice anchors.

Now there's no use me describing the filthy, stinking, slippery job of flinching a whale—or flensing, as the books call it, just in the same way that they always write a harponeer as though he

was a harpooner. It is all pure beastliness, though very profitable, and whilst I rung the spare oil out of my clothes, I thought that here was extra comforts for my poor old mother at home in Ballindrochater, and wished that I might soon get back to a post-office or a consulate to send her an order.

But we were far enough off that yet. The Dutch whaler—she was out of Bremen—had got her ice anchors made fast to the same floe, and when they had done flinching their calf, which was only a sucker, and carried very little bone, they got over on to the ice, and came abreast of the *Gleaner*, and began to make themselves unpleasant.

They started by mocking us because we were Scotch, and that's not a thing any crew will take quietly from Dutchmen. But Captain Black seemed to be everywhere about the greasy decks at once, and would let no man leave his work of cutting in the whale.

They told Black what they thought of the cut of the fringe of beard beneath his chin, they talked about the way our beastly patent topsails worked, and picked out every other weak spot on the ship. One fat sausage, all hair and oilskin petticoat, even went so far as to make remarks on my personal appearance. They didn't speak English well, but good enough to be understood, and they offered all the provocation they could think of. They were doing it deliberately in view of a fight; and I was pleased to see so much spirit in Dutchmen. I thought it was a shame that they should be balked of their desire, especially as we had pinched

that big cow-whale. But there was no getting in between Captain Black and business. He was as stiff and formal as a navy officer. 'Get along with your work, you swine,' was the most unbending thing he could find to say. Most of his talk was real hard, sour, strong, teetotal swearing.

Well, that crew worked. The taykles squealed, and the blubber came off in great blankets as fast as the men below could cut it adrift from the pink beef it covered. I know I drove my old winch till it nearly bucked clear of the deck planks. If we couldn't answer back, or go out on to the ice and scrap with them, at any rate we would show these beastly Dutchmen what work really was when right men set about it. As they considered it was their fish we were flinching, and their twenty-two hundredweight of bone at three thousand sovereigns a ton we were hoisting on board, even this did not tend to cheer them. They are a people with a very small sense of the humorous, those Dutch, and they called us all the thieves, and pirates, and robbers they could set their tongues upon. You see they are a saving nation, the Dutch—especially those coming out of Bremen—and mighty cannie ower the siller, and when it comes to passing compliments, that's a very easy point to jape about.

But at last we got all of that cow-whale cut in, and the carcase turned adrift, and, says Black : ' You can leave the decks filthy for an hour, and clean them next watch. If there's any of you wants to stretch his legs on the flaw, I give you an hour to be away.'

The hands let up a yelp of delight, and were on the to'-gallan' rails like so many monkeys.

'Wait a minute. That dashed McTodd's prophecies, or whatever they are, are coming off like the eclipses in the nautical almanack. Gale—boat-steerer overboard—vinegar kag stove—two months a clean ship—and then a big cow-whale, and trouble over it with a Dutchman. By goats! it's all come right, down to the gender of the blooming whale. Now, lads, you all remember what came next on the list, and I expect you all think about it the same way I do. But if there's two ships, and trouble's got to come to one of them, I don't want the *Gleaner* to be the unlucky one.'

Everybody listened, but nobody answered.

He stamped his foot on the deck. 'You're a lot of thick-headed beggars. I don't believe you see which side your biscuit's margarined even now. Well, here's a hint for you. Look at the oil that's all over these decks. Wouldn't she burn finely with all that oil to help? Now, away with you on to the flaw, and have a good spell of snow balling, and be back for duty in an hour's time.

With that he stepped down the cabin companion, and slammed to the slide over his head.

The hands did not want any more telling. Some of them picked the iron pins out of the pin-rail; one said: 'There may be rhinoceroses on that ice; you never can tell. I'm going to take along my blubber spade.' All went armed. The Dutchmen had quit mocking us, and had gone back to their own ship. A fog had spread

out over the floe, which hid what we were doing, and we were alongside of her without interference.

There was a fight before we got on board that was bitter enough on both sides. We'd got to pay for what had been said to us when we couldn't either answer back or hit; and they were still grieved at losing that fine cow-whale, and the siller which it would have brought them in Bremen. So we went at it nasty and viciously. It wasn't a fight such as you are accustomed to at home, or on British ships, just hitting a man over the eye with a belaying pin, or using a handspike or shovel to him, or just driving a bunch of fingers, or a stay-sail hank, into his face. These foreigners are more bloody-minded. They have all got their knives, and are only too pleased to use them; and we, knowing their beastly habits, had brought along blubber spades, and tail knives, and whale lances, and just gave them socks. It was bloody war between us, and no mistake.

They dared us to board them when we stood on the snow and the ice alongside, and we did it with such a jump that the rigging above rattled itself clean of icicles. Their decks were full of snow, trodden in with blood and oil from the calf-whale when we got there—they're nasty, slovenly wretches, these Dutchmen, as you'd know if you'd had them to deal with in the stoke-hold—and presently there began to be blood on the deck of another sort. They killed one of our harpooners as he came up over the side, sliced him pretty nearly in half, so that he fell back between the ship's side and the floe, and was crushed and

drowned there. And after that we began to lose our tempers.

They'd got the better of us in numbers—these Dutchmen always have to have three men to do the work one Britisher can get through if you drive him—but when it came to real scrapping, they weren't in it with us. We'd cleared the deck of them in three minutes, barring two who had got their gruel, and lay quiet enough, poor beggars; and the rest had either run away down below, or jumped overboard on to the floe, and gone hiding in the fog behind the ice hummocks.

Personally, I was for following it up, and going on below. It is only correct that when you go calling on another ship you should taste their hospitality, and these Dutchmen always carry plenty of those green cases of squareface gin. But the mates and the harponeers and Stubbs passed the word to stay on deck, and stood a guard over the hatchways and the companions. It was as well they did so. We were all of us more or less scratched; some were bleeding like pigs; all were raw savage, like men are after a fight with these foreigners; and if we'd got down below, and they'd have given us any more of their sauce, it would have ended by every soul on that Dutch barque being murdered.

But we were not ready for back yet. We scratched together all the loose wood we could find, building it in a pile over the quarter-deck skylight. We split up bulwarks and fife rails to add to the heap; and then spilt a tubful of blubber over the lot, and set it alight. Then the

officers drove us back again to the floe, and we stumbled and clambered off over the rough, jagged ice back to the *Gleaner*, leaving the Dutchmen the fun of putting out the bonfire as they chose.

Black came out on deck just as we got back. He was peering under his greasy hand through the fog. 'What's that light ahead there?' he asks. 'Seems to me hardly like aurora borealis.'

'I think that old Dutch barque must have caught alight,' says the second mate. 'But they'll easy put out that bit blaze. She's very strong handed.'

'You're bleeding,' says Black.

'I tumbled and cut myself on the floe,' says the second mate. 'So did some of the others.'

'Well, come below, and me and the steward will stitch you up. There's needles and diachylum in the medicine chest. It's funny that other barque should have got afire after what McTodd said. Now, as long as we're not beset, we're clear of all those ruddy prophecies. Ah, there's the man himself. Have you managed to tumble and hurt yourself?'

'I thank ye kindly, sir ; no.'

'Trust a blooming prophet to look after his own skin. Now come aft and below the rest of you. And Mr. Mate, you're sound, aren't you?—as soon as you see they've got that fire well under on the Dutchman, cast off from the flaw and get her under way. We must get on with our fishing. You put those bags over the name as I told you?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then keep them there. No reason for that

other barque to know who we are. They're a narrow-minded, upright lot in Dundee, and there's no profit in having more tales than's needful buzzing round our ears when we get home. Things look different on Tayside. You'd hardly mistake McTodd for Ezekiel in Dundee, especially if he had been ashore for an hour with pay in his pocket, and had got his filthy thirst to work. But the cold in the Arctic here seems to have fertilized his power.'

'Yes, sir,' said the little steward, 'at home, at the missionary meetings, they call the Esquimaux *ankoot* a holy fraud, but on shore here in the villages I've seen him work magic that the finest conjurer couldn't touch. I've got the needles and silk, sir, and the carbolic, and a sponge and basin, just as the handbook says. I'll sew up their cuts, sir, if you wish.'

'Well, you'd better,' said Black, 'as you're aboard here as doctor; it will be practice for you, anyway. Mind and sandpaper the needles clean, though, before you begin.'

CHAPTER VII

A DEAL IN BEARS

WHEN a whaling ship is beset in the ice of Davis Straits there is remarkably little work for her second engineer, once the engines have been nicely tallowed down. You might think there is always some job to be found in an engine-room, and on good ships there is. But the scrap-heap they called engines on the *Gleaner* were no more the real thing than a collar-galled Las Palmas tartana pony is a real horse, and you couldn't get any liking or friendship for them. They only worked at eighteen pounds, and as for paint, Captain Black would as soon have given you rum.

Now, I am no man that can sit in my berth and laze. If I've no work to do, I get to thinking about Ballindrochater and the Free Kirk ministry, which my father intended I should have adorned, and the various kinds of fool I had made of myself instead ; and, as this is depressing, the next thing is I'm passing the time of day with the man who's nearest, and then there's a fight, and somebody's nose slewed over on to his cheek bone. This sort of thing gets one disliked, and as I was not over

popular already on the *Gleaner*, I made up my mind to avoid it. Consequently, I built a variety of small organs, till all the materials were used up ; I sewed myself a suit of clothes adapted for the Arctic climate out of slop-chest blankets, sealskins, and oilies ; and I did all the carpenter's work for him till there was no more to do.

Finally, I bethought me of sporting on the ice. There was head-money offered for all bears, foxes, seals, musk-oxen, and such like that were shot and gathered, and I always had it in mind that my mother at home in the village had no half-pay of mine to draw, owing to the beastly habit of these blue-nosers (as they call the Greenland ships) in paying only on the catch, and when you get back to port. So I went to the skipper, and he gave me a Henry rifle, well rusted, and eight cartridges. 'Show me you can use those, Mr. McTodd,' says he, 'and I'll give ye more. But I'm no' certain yet that every bear ye'll shoot at will be a real bear, ye drunken, dissolute mechanic.'

He'd a wonderful tongue in him, had Black. He'd no strength of body ; in fact he'd only ugly words to keep the crew together with ; and he did it better than most men would have done with a gun and a kidful of iron belaying pins.

Now I made a big mistake with that rusty old gun. I may be a sportsman, but before that I'm an engineer, and it seemed to me that Heaven sent metal into this world to be kept bright and clean. So I took her all from together, and made all the parts as smooth and sweet as you'd see in a gun-maker's shop, barring for rust-pits, and then gave

them a nice thick daubing of oil against the Arctic weather. Then I put on my own clothes that I had made, and all the other clothes that I could get lent, and climbed out over the to'gallan' rail on to the ice.

The *Gleaner* lay in a bay some two miles from the shore, and let me tell you, if you do not know it, that Arctic ice is no curling rink. There are great hills, and knolls, and bergs, and valleys spread all over, and even where it's about level, the underfoot is as hard going as a newly-metalled road before the steam-roller's passed it over.

The air was clear enough when I left the barque, and though the mercury was out of use and coiled up snugly in the bulb, it wasn't so cold as you might think, as just then there was no wind. It's a breeze up in the Arctic that makes you feel the chill. There was no sun, of course ; there never is sun up there in that dreary winter ; but the stars were burning blue and clear, and every now and then a big catherine wheel of aurora would show off, for all the world like a firework exhibition.

My whiskers ! but it was lonely, though, once you had left the ship behind. There was just the scrunching of your own feet on the frost rime, and not another sound in all the world. Even the ice was frozen too hard to squeak. And overhead in that purple black Heaven, you never knew Who was looking down at you. It was that last which disquieted me most. In a crowd one only gets a share of attention ; but out there in that cold, bare, black, icy silence, I had occasion

to remember that Neil Angus McTodd had been the two ends and the bight of a sinner in his time, and an undivided scrutiny such as that was then, is a very nervous thing to endure. It made me shiver when I glanced up towards those blue, cold stars, and the deep purple darkness that lay between and behind them.

It may be then that I was thinking less of my hunting than was advisable, for of a sudden I was woke up to the sound of heavy feet padding over the crisp frost rime. I turned me round sharply enough, but as far as the dim light carried, there was nothing alive to be seen through the gloom. So soon as I stopped, the footsteps stopped too, and I don't mind admitting to you that my scalp tickled. You see Black still ran the *Gleaner* on those nasty teetotal principles, and they play the very whiskers with a man's nerves.

However, when I'd hauled up the hammer of the Henry, and it dropped into position with a good, wholesome *cluck*, my nervousness very soon filtered out. There's comfort about a heavy-bore rifle like a Henry—which is the kind always used by whalers and sealers—that you can't derive from those fancy light bores like the Lee-Metford. And then, as it seemed that the animal, whatever it might be, wasn't going to move till I did, I shuffled my high sealskin boots on the crisp snow to make believe I was tramping again.

It started after me promptly. It was hard to tell the direction, because every sound in that icy silence was echoed by a thousand bergs and hummocks of the ice; but presently from behind a

small splintered ridge of the floe, there strolled out what seemed to me the largest he-bear in the Arctic regions. Ye must know that the night air there is a deceptive light—it enlarges things—and the beast appeared to me as standing some five feet six high at the shoulder, and measuring some twenty feet from nose to rump. My nerves had been a good deal tampered with of late. I've mentioned, I believe, that the *Gleaner* was a teetotal ship, and I'd freely have given a toe-joint then for just two fingers of whisky.

However, there was me, and there was the bear all in the dark middle of that awful loneliness, with no one to interfere; and as there was only one of us to get home, I preferred it should not be him. So I took a brace on myself, and stood with the Henry ready to come up.

There was no' what ye might call diffidence about that bear. He slouched along up to me at a steady walk, with the hair and skin on him swinging about as though it was too large for his carcase, and he was wearing a misfit. He seemed to look upon me as dinner, and no hurry needful. There was a sort of confounded certainty about him that made me angry.

I was no' what you might call a marksman in those days, and so I set a bit hummock about ten yards off as a limit where I could not very conveniently miss, and waited till the bear should come against that. Well, he came to it right enough in his own good time. There was, as I've said before, no diffidence about the creature. And then I upped with the Henry and loosed her off.

Cluck went the hammer on to the nipple, but there was no *bang*.

My whiskers! it was a misfire, and there was the bear coming down on me, as steady and unconcerned as a traction-engine. I clawed out that cartridge, and crammed in another. The bitter cold of the metal skinned my fingers like escaping steam. Then I cocked again, shouldered the Henry, and loosed again.

Once more she wouldn't go off!

The bear was very near on the top of me, and was beginning to rear on its hinder legs. Somehow the rifle came into my hand muzzle-end, and I wiped the great brute across the eyes with the butt, hard enough to have felled an ox.

I might as well have struck it with a cane. *Whack* went a big yellow-white paw, and the Henry went flying, and my wrists tingled with the jar, and there was I left looking, I've my doubt you'll think, very humorous.

The bear might have got me then if it had chosen. But it must needs turn aside to go snuffle the rifle, and lick off the oil on the locks, and then I turned and footed it.

Now, at the best of times I am no sprinter, and in the great mountain of clothes one wears up there in the cold Arctic night, no man can make much speed. Besides, the way was that uneven, it was a case of hands and scramble more often than plain running over the sharp spiky level.

The bear, once he had finished his snuffle and lick at the Henry, came on at a dreadful pace, making nothing of these obstacles that baulked

me. He had been born up there, you know. He laid himself out—I could see over my shoulder—like one of those American trotting horses, making nothing of the ups and downs, and rubbly ankle-breaking ice. In about two shakes he was snorting at my ankles again, till I could almost feel the hot, stinking breath of him. The bundle of clothes hampered me. I stripped off my outer over-all, and let it drop behind me.

The bear stopped and snuffled that, but I didn't stay to watch him. I got good fifty fathoms ahead whilst he was occupied. But presently, when he'd got all his satisfaction out of that, on he comes again, and I had to give him my coat. I hadn't a chance of equalling him in pace, but this trick with the clothing never tired him. Fifty fathoms was the least gain I made over a single piece, and as I got lower down towards my skin he stayed over them longer. I suppose he must have found them more to his liking.

But still the *Gleaner* was a long way off, over very tumbled ice, and there was I careering on in a costume which was barely enough for decency, and certainly insufficient for the climate.

However, it's little enough the bear cared for such refinements as those. I stripped off my singlet as I ran, and gained nigh on two hundred yards whilst he investigated it; then another garment, which I will not particularise, tearing them most wastefully; and there were the barque's upper spars showing above the hummocks half a mile away, and me in my long sealskin boots a most discreditable apparition.

But there was no help for it. Up came the hot, stinking breath behind me, and I leaned up against a hummock and stripped off a boot. I hailed the *Gleaner* with what wind I had left, but no one gave heed. Away went the other boot, and there was I running mother-naked over the jagged floe, leaving blood on every foot mark.

Right up to the vessel did the outrageous beast chase me, and then when I got on board and called for guns it slunk away into the shadows of a berg and was seen no more. My feet were cut to the bone, I was frost-nipped in twenty places, and you'll think I had a poor enough time of it. But the thought of that canvas over-all which I'd thrown away first kept me cheerful. It was indeed a very humorous circumstance. Ye see it was a borrowed one.

I was got down below to a berth, and the steward, who was rated as a doctor, tended me. He'd no' much experience, hadn't that steward, but I suppose every man has to learn, and, anyway, he was most liberal with his drugs. Why, I could have gone through the entire medicine chest if I had been a week under that man's charge.

But it was Captain Black who put sourness into the whole affair. Black comes down to my bunk, and says he: 'Where's that Henry?'

'Lying quiet on the ice,' says I, 'an' be beggared to it, unless it's touring round the Polar sea in the bear's inside.'

'Do you mean to say you left that rifle behind? My rifle?'

‘I did that same. The perjured thing wasn’t strong enough to fire a cartridge. I tried two.’

‘By goats! I’ll make you fork out for it, you swine. I’ll log the circumstance, an’ stop it out of your pay at slop-chest prices, and that’s thirty-three per cent advance on cash.

On which I called him an Aberdonian, and thanked Heaven I came from Ballindrochater myself; and then he began to lose his temper. He was a most extraordinary pious man, this Captain Black, as a usual thing. He was one of the few captains left on the fishing who kept up the routine of a Sunday service. But he’d a tongue in him worse than a seaport stipendiary magistrate’s. Indeed, after I’d given him my views of Aberdeen and Dundee, he used some most injurious language, and me not having had a drop of liquor to my lips for months, I was in no condition to give him back anything like fair exchange. Besides, I made an unfortunate admission. I owned up to taking the rifle from together and cleaning her. I owned up, too, that I’d been free with the oil.

Black stuck out his face at me, and his fringe of beard fairly bristled. ‘And you call yourself an engineer! You talk about having gone through the shops! A tailor’s shop I should say it was, and in a workhouse. You’re an Englishman, that’s what’s the matter with you. You’re a cockney. You were just called Todd, and clapped a Mac in front of it to make people think you come of a decent Scots family. But you don’t take me in. I’m Captain Black, I

am, and every one that's near me's got to know it. Put your filthy engine-room oil on my Henry's locks would you? Why, you gleed cockney swine, have you yet to learn that oil freezes up here as hard as cheese, and you've made up the lock space of that poor goat of a rifle into one solid chunk?'

'My whiskers! I never thought of it doing that.'

'To look at your face, you never thought of much outside a drink pot.'

'I think of my duty that I've signed on for, and I do that well, and that's all you've any concern about. I'm on this half-baked steamboat as second engineer, and I defy even you to say my work as that's not been well done. For that matter a Krooboy donkey-man could tend your scrap-heap engines here. But I'll tell you another matter, Captain Pink-chin Black, that comes nearer home to you. If you attended to your business of getting this ship full of whale blubber and seals instead of wasting time in oratory and attempts at wit, we'd not have been beset in the ice here in Davis Straits. We'd have been home in Scotland, and sharing up fine profits.'

'Do you dare to teach me my trade?'

'A child might do that, and you could learn from it. You can put every word I've said down your teetotal neck and digest it. I've prophesied once before on this ship, and it came off. Do you want me to do the same again?'

'Na, na, lad. Hold your wisht. Ye're a

cranky deevil, and I've, maybe, been irritating ye too much. I wish to hear no more from you.'

'What you wish, and what you'll get, are two very different things,' said I, for the man had used injurious language to me, and I was just for snapping out the first thing that came to my mind which seemed calculated to cause him pain. 'Whales, through your incapacity, we're not likely to get till the ice breaks up; and as for seals, I can make no promise about them. But if it was worth my while to do such a thing, I could bring enough bearskins to pay for this wintering.'

'I should like to see ye do it, if ye do it by fair, ordinary means. But, man, I'm asking for no more of your witch tricks.'

Black was beginning to be sorry he'd come down to me; I could see that. So I was all the more anxious to make him uncomfortable.

'Ye'll go back with a clean ship, I can see that, and I'm thinking the owners in Dundee will no' be extraordinary pleased with ye. I shall apply for command of her mysel' next voyage.'

I winked at him from where I lay covered up in the bunk. I just wondered at the man being able to keep his hands off me; still more was I surprised at the command he held over that vinegar tongue of his. I ought to have been put on my guard by this; but, like the cock-sure fool I was, it merely seemed to me he'd got his gruel and was frightened, and so I fell into his trap.

'I've heard you speak of the mother you've got at home in Ballindrochater, Mr. McTodd,

and the trouble it caused you to leave her without any half-pay to draw. Now, I'll make you an offer touching those bears. For every skin you bring here aboard, I'll give you seven shillings bonus over and above your ordinary share as member of the ship's company. I'll give you another rifle, two rifles if you like, and a fine bag of cartridges. But, you bragging beggar, I make one condition. You take yourself off and away from the ship to do your hunting. You may make yourself a snow-house to live in, and live on the meat you kill.'

'You wish to murder me?'

'I wish to be shut of you, and that's the truth. Man, I believe you're Jonah resurrected. We've had no luck since first you put your dirty, oily foot on my deck planks. And, what's more, the crew's of my way of thinking. So, refuse my offer, you beggar, and I'll put you in irons this minute, and keep you there either till you're dead, or till I can fling you ashore on Dundee pier-head. Remember, there'll be no questions asked, ye dissolute mechanic. The crew's wi' me, and no one will complain, and besides, I'm Captain Black, with a reputation that would carry me clear through any court in Scotland.'

Now there's no doubt that Black meant what he said, and so I did not waste dignity by arguing with him. I'd no taste for irons, and as for being turned out on the ice, well, I'd a plan ahead. But I didn't intend to go and leave him more comfortable than I could avoid. So I shut my eyes tight, and turned facing him, and said I thanked him

kindly for permission to leave the ship. I said it had come to me she would have very bad luck during this wintering. (It was easy to guess that.) Her people would be very sickly. (As scurvy had broken out already, I was no wizard there.) And they'd have deaths on board, quite a number of deaths. (Men most always do die on a whaler when she's beset for a winter, so I couldn't go far wrong over them.) I said, considering these circumstances, I should be glad to be quit of such an unwholesome ship.

'Hold your mischievous tongue,' shouts Black, and I noticed that his round shaven chin inside the frame of whiskers was white and sweating. I rubbed my hands under the bedclothes with the thought of how I was frightening Black. 'You've offered of your own free will to leave my ship, and, by goats! you shall do it. You can stay in this bunk till your feet are cured—I give you three days to get sound in—and then away you go, and there's the whole of Greenland and all the Polar Sea for you to range in. Three days from now I shall enter in the log that "*Second engineer, McTodd, left ship for own wish and purposes. Trust he comes to no harm,*" and if that's all the epitaph you get in this world, you need not grumble. You prophets are a dashed nuisance, and you must not expect ordinary treatment.'

My whiskers! but they were just aching to be rid of me. This prophesying sort of grows on a man; once you've started it, it's like the whisky craving, you've got to go on with it at all costs; and I could no more resist just letting my few

remarks slip round amongst the crew, than a man can avoid going just a wee bit on the ra-ta when he gets into port, and is paid off after a long voyage.

The nerves of the *Gleaner* people were in strings from the cold and the blackness of the Arctic night, and it put the horrors on the lot of them. The one thing they wanted was to see the last of me. A notion seemed to have gone round that if any man gave me something before I set off, that man would be safe from further interference ; and as a consequence I could have taken away with me the barque's main-mast if I'd a fancy for it. But my means of transport were small. There was a bit sledge, built by Stubbs and Chips, that I packed with some grub, and two Henry rifles and a few tools, and five hundred cartridges that they'd nicked for me from aft, and but for that, and the clothes I stood in, no more could be taken.

Then I went on deck into the bitter cold, and over the side, and stood on the ice, and was ready to start on my journey. The crew lined the rail to see me off, and I can tell you their faces were very different. I could just see them in the black gloom. The older ones and the more sickly were savage, and wished Jonah might die as soon as might be. The younger ones were crying to see a fellow driven away into that icy loneliness.

But for myself I didn't care. Captain Black thought he was sending me out to die of exposure and inexperience ; but the humorous part of it was that I did not intend to do any such thing.

So there was Black, who in reality was a very religious-minded man, telling himself he was no better than a murderer, in spite of what he had entered up in the log book, whilst in reality he was no more murderer than you are ; and that, let me tell you, makes a very comical situation when you think it over.

Now I had method in all this performance. Soon after we were beset in the ice, a family of Esquimaux had come off to the *Gleaner* to pay a polite call and get what they could out of us. They were that dirty you could have chipped them with a scaling hammer, but they were very friendly. One buck who stepped down into the engine-room—Amatikita, he said his name was—had some English, and came to the point as straight as you might have done yourself.

‘Give ’im a dlink, Cappie,’ says he.

‘I’d do it if I could, old man,’ says I, ‘but this is a dry ship, as I know to my cost.’

‘Plenty dlink in that box,’ says he, handling an oil-can.

‘Oh, if that’s your tippie, wade in,’ I told him, and he clapped the nozzle between his lips, and sucked down a gill of cylinder lubricating oil as though it had been rum.

‘You seem to like it,’ I said ; ‘have some more.’

But that was his load. He let me know he preferred schnapps or Danish brandy, which they buy from the missionary settlement, but he thanked me for the kind thought all the same, and asked me to visit his village when I could get

away from the ship. And just about then, some of his friends were caught pilfering, and the whole crew of them were bundled away.

Now I had noted that most of these Esquimaux had bits of bear-skins amongst their other furs, and it was that I had in my mind whilst I was passing the time of day with Captain Black. Amatikita had pointed out the place where his village lay, and it was to that I intended making my way with as little delay as possible. But I kept this to myself, and let no word of it slip out on the *Gleaner*. Indeed when I was over the barque's rails, I screwed my eyes tight and said my prophecies over again slowly, and then turned and headed off due north across the ice. I wanted them to believe I'd gone away to die of cold and hunger, and that the guilt of sending me lay on the *Gleaner*. I did not want them to spend too comfortable a winter. That, you'll understand, was the humour of the situation.

I climbed and stumbled on in this direction then till I was well out of their sight and hearing amongst the hummocks, and then I turned in at right angles for the shore.

There was snow falling and driving most of the time, which made direction a matter of uncertainty, and so you might have put it down at about nine to one (if you were a gambler) I missed Amatikita's village altogether.

The cold up yonder in that Arctic night takes away your breath. It seems to take the manhood out of you. You stumble along gasping. By a chance I came upon an Esquimaux sealing—

or, rather, he scented me—and he came up from somewhere amongst the hillocks just as I had sat down for a bit of rest, and beat and thumped me into wakefulness. Then he packed me on to his dog-sleigh, and took my own bit of a sled behind, and set his fourteen-foot whip cracking, and off we set.

Well, you have to be pretty far gone if you can stay asleep with an Innuits' dog-sledge jolting and jumping beneath you, and I was woke up fine, especially as the Esquimaux sat on top of me. And so in time we brought up at the huts, and a good job too. I'd been tramping bang in the wrong direction, so it turned out, and besides, if I had come up with the village, I might well have walked over the top of it, and never have known, as it was drifted up level. There was a bit of a rabbit-hole giving entrance to each hut, with some three fathoms of tunnel underground, and skin curtains to keep out the draught; but once inside you might think you were in a stoke-hold again. There was the same strong smell of oil and people, and almost the same warmth. I tell you it was fine after that slicing cold outside.

It was Amatikita's house I was brought to, and he was as hospitable as any boarding-house keeper you could meet in a seaport town. They took off my outer clothes and put them on the rack above the soapstone lamp to dry, and they'd have stripped me to the buff, too, according to the Esquimaux custom when indoors, if I'd have let them. But I knew a trick worth two of that. The man who wears clothes gives the command all

the world over. Myself, I've gone into an Oil Rivers village of cannibals, and thrown down an old pair of pants and watched the scramble. The man who has got those bags has always been king of the other niggers before the day was out.

So it was here. They recognised me as a superior at once, and kept on doing it. They put tender young seal-meat in the dish above the lamp, and when it was cooked I ate my whack of the stew, and then got up and took the best place on the raised sleeping-bench at the farther side of the hut. I cut a fill for my pipe, lit up, and passed the plug, and presently we were all as pleased as whiskers, and you could have dug out the atmosphere with a spade.

There was a two-year-old bairn there, with its little crop sticking out like a drum, and I took that on my knee and danced it till it crowed. 'You may name this kid after me,' I said. 'I'm called Mr. Neil Angus McTodd, which should be one of the best respected names in Scotland, though it isn't for the time being. But, anyway, it will be an advantage to the bairn to bear it here.'

They were very much pleased at my kindness, as I intended they should be, and Amatikita spoke up like a man. 'Very pleased to see you, Cappie. What you come for? What you want?'

'You're a man of business,' I said. 'You waste no time. I like that. What I want's bear-skins. The jackets of big, fat, white, baggy-trouserred polar bears, you savvy, and I toted along a couple of tip-top rifles for you to get them with.'

Now, I make you a fair offer. Get me all the bears in the North Polar regions, and you shall have my two Henrys and all the cartridges that are left over. And as for meat, you shall have that as your own perquisite. Now, if you can get a better offer than that, I want to know where it's coming from.

'You want shoot them bears yo'seluf?'

'Not if I can help it. I'm an engineer—*mechanista*, you savvy—and a good one at that. But as a sportsman I've had but little experience, and don't seem drawn towards learning. It is too draughty up here, just at present, for my taste. I'll stay and keep house, and maybe do a bit repairing and inventing amongst the furniture. I've brought along a hand-vice and a bag of tools with me, and if you can supply drift-wood and some scrap iron, I'll make this turf-house of yours equal to a crofter's cottage.'

Amatikita reached up and fumbled amongst the icicles in the rafters above, and brought out a piece of an iron knee that had once held together some poor old whaler's timbers. 'Can you make cook-dish to stand above lamp, Cappie? 'Nother Innuited down bay yonder got iron cook-dish, gory fine, 'n' his wives give talk to my wives about it.'

'It's women that make the world go round. You shall have your kettle, although, let me tell you, it would take a first-rate engineer, like the one you've now got residing under your roof, to make that cankered shank-end of scrap into domestic utensils such as you seem to have a wish for.'

However, it was with that cooking kettle, as

you might say, if you wished to use a poetic simile, that I laid the bed-plates of a reputation.

Amatikita and all the other men, with one exception, were away most days with my rifles finding bears, and blowing unexpected holes into them. The one man left was the sorcerer of the tribe, the *ankoot*, as he was called in the Innuït lingo, and he was inclined to look upon me with a jealous eye. Up till then he had done all the conjuring his friends had any use for, and when he looked at me working miracles (as they considered it) with that shank end, he sort of thought his trade would be damaged, and let up hints that I'd the devil to help me. But there were no flies on Amatikita. He said that it might be devil's work, or it mightn't; he didn't know or care; but anyway the kettle was a good kettle, and if people didn't like it they could go and get their seal chop cooked elsewhere.

That *ankoot* was no fool. He saw which way the cat jumped, had his usual fit on the floor, all regular and proper whilst you waited, and when he came to again said the Great Spirit had told him Mr. Neil Angus McTodd was very far removed from a devil indeed.

But his interference did not sweeten me against the man, and one or two of his habits made me sick. Amatikita had a mother, a poor old bundle of wrinkles and dirt, who had ground away her teeth sucking the blubber off sealskins to make them fit for wearing, and therefore, according to their beastly idea, had come to the end of her usefulness. The *ankoot* said the time had arrived

to dig a nice, well-fitting grave outside in the cold green ice, and bury the poor old thing, and leave her there to die. Amatikita was feeling quite European by that time, and asked me what I thought.

God help me for a dissolute blackguard, but here was a subject I could warm up to! I'd always in my mind my own poor old mother who had to live in such sorry style at home in Ballindrochater, all because her guzzling brute of a son put the wages that should have gone to her down his own disgusting neck instead. It made my eyes wet and blinky to think of her, and to remember that she'd be thinking of me. Ay, God help me, she'd be thinking o' Neil.

I didn't start to fight, as you might have expected of me. I just sat myself down to talk in the Innuít language as far as I knew it, with Danish and English to fill up. I know there are some who say I ought to have instructed them in the tenets of the Free Kirk, and pointed out the errors of the U.P. and the Established. They mention that my father, the well-known minister, would have done this, and I was my father's son. But I left all that branch of theology alone. I just drew pictures of hell and hot coals, fit to have scared a professor of chemistry into a regular church member, and 'It's there,' says I, 'there, you bleeders, that you'll go and fry for everlasting, world without end, if you lay your filthy sacrilegious fingers on your mothers in that way. Remember, you dogs, that your poor mothers bare ye, and the larger part o' ye have been a pain and a trouble to

them ever since. Get on to your blasted knees and pray they may be long spared to ye, and that ye may have strength to keep off the drink, and so be able to provide them with all due comfort, as a small return for what they have done.'

Amatikita was clean convinced by what I said, and no error about it. He promised that his mother should have a place on the sleeping bench to the end of her days, and very pleased she seemed to be about it; and as for the *ankoot*, he came to the conclusion that that curacy suited him no longer, and borrowed up what odd dogs he could find, and a sledge, and a couple of harpoons, and lit out for a new parish, and I'm sure, I hope, he died on the way. A man with views like that deserves the worst you can wish him.

But all this time I was not forgetting what brought me there. Whenever those powdering winter gales eased for a bit, I'd just pass the word to Amatikita and his friends, and off they'd go with the howling dog-sledges and the Henrys, and it was rare that they'd come back without one bear, and often they'd bring back two, or even three. These white bears sleep through the black winter months in hollows in the cliffs and places like that, and the Esquimaux know the lairs, but it is rare enough they dare to tackle them. Small blame you'd say, if you saw the flimsy bone-tipped lances and harpoons, which is all they are armed with.

But with a good, smashing, heavy-bore Henry rifle it is a different thing. The Esquimaux were no cowards. They would walk up within a yard

of a bear, when the dogs had ringed it, and blow half its head away with a single shot. You see, they knew enough about Christianity to cut a cross deep in the nose of their bullets before they shot. And then they would draw the carcase up to the huts with the dog trains, and the women would skin and dress the meat, and then Amatikita and the other bucks and the dogs would gorge themselves. But not till these had done would the women come into the huts and have their share of the meal.

You'd think after seeing them ship down some five or seven pounds of good solid meat, they'd have been torpid and just wishful for sleep, but not a bit of it. Grub seemed to act on them just as whisky might on you. It just made them friendly and cheerful. They'd sing long songs on two notes, which seemed to interest them very much. They'd dance peculiar dances—too peculiar to write about. And they'd play with the windmills I made.

Those windmills were a great line. I turned out the first to amuse my name-child, the little N'l'aangus, as they called him, and the first thing I knew was his mammy had taken it away and was worshipping it as a god of her own. I told her to stop that and not be a fool, and took the mill away and gave it back to N'l'aangus. Next day there was Amatikita at the same game.

‘Quit fooling,’ said I to him.

‘That thing all-e-same god,’ says he. ‘Nothing else in the world like him.’

‘Well, if that's your test of divinity,’ said I,

'we'll soon bring this one off his perch.' The mill was only a toy I'd whittled with my pocket knife out of drift wood, and with the same materials, whilst the bucks were out hunting that day, I made a dozen others. When they came back they saw the argument at once.

'You right, Cappie. No proper god. Too many of him.'

'That's logic,' said I. 'So now you can blow at them without being profane. You can blow till you're sick, if it pleases you,' which they did, being a very merry crew, and easily pleased with toys.

Still, for all that I kept well occupied; it isn't all undiluted jam spending a winter in the hut of a Davis Straits Esquimau. They look up highly to you for being white—I believe they even respect Dutchmen—and do 'most everything they're told. But when you've run out of tobacco, and have been living day in day out on seal-blood soup and tough bear meat, why you're simply pining to scour your teeth on a piece of good salt horse again, and be near men who can give you back as good language as you use yourself. There are some who would have taken an Esquimaux woman as wife; indeed, Amatikita offered freely to fit me out in that way; but I had my pride about me still, and refused.

Finally, it was Amatikita himself that in a way gave me my marching orders. He dived in through the entrance way of the hut one day and told me that the floe was beginning to break.

The news affected me like the blow of a whip. I went out into the open and found the sun up.

The bucks were overhauling their kayaks. The Esquimaux women were sewing patches on to an oomiak. The snow was wet underfoot, and sea-fowl swooped and squawked over the buried huts in search for offal. The floe was still sound where it joined the shore, but to seaward lanes of blue water showed between the ice, and in one of them a Finner whale was spouting pale grey mist.

I nipped Amatikita by the arm. 'Here,' I said, 'I must go, and quick. Bid the boys get together a team of dogs, and yoke them!'

'No can make too big hurry, Cappie. And them rifles? They lost. No can find them.'

'Oh, I know all about that. You're a good buck, Tiki, though you are a bit of a thief. But a bargain's a bargain, and I stick to what I promised. The rifles are yours, and you can keep what's left of the cartridges.'

Amatikita had a Henry in his fist in two shakes, and was dancing like a man gone mad. 'Cappie, you shall take with you the bear-skins.' He showed me on his fingers, not having words for figures, that there were nine-and-twenty.

'Right-O,' said I; but, to tell the truth, I was thinking little of bear-skins then, being only keen to get off, and once more associate with my own kind. I knew that Black would not wait for me a minute, even if he supposed me to be alive. Black would be off and back to the fishing the moment the *Gleaner* could clear herself of the ice, and small blame to him; and it made me sick to think of being marooned.

But the Esquimaux were keen to give me my

will then, in case I should go back on what I had promised about the Henrys. The dogs were caught and harnessed, and their traces toggled on to the bows of the two biggest sleighs. They fought amongst themselves like devils, as is always the habit of the Innuits dogs in spring, and the boys cut at them with the fourteen-foot whips that nick out a piece of skin and hair every time they fall. N'l'aangus came and slobbered against my knee. The women and the men who were going to be left behind crowded round and rubbed their dirty oily cheeks against my clothes. But I'd only got eyes for the floe, and for the lanes of blue water that were multiplying in it even as I watched.

At last the skins were fastened by thongs to the sledges, and word was shouted to the dog leader of each team. The free dogs started; the heavy sledge bows rode up on to the backs of those that were still fighting, and forced them on; and presently away went the teams full pelt, the sledges leaping and crashing in their wake, with the drivers, and a certain Scots engineer who was unused to such acrobatics, clinging on top of the packs. My whiskers! but yon was a wild ride over the rotten, cracking, sodden floe, under the fresh, bright sunshine of that Arctic spring morn.

Twenty times we had to turn to circumnavigate some newly-opening lane of water; the half-melted snow-slush flew in sheets from the runners; the dogs' breath kept us in a white cloud of steam; but gales had levelled the floe much since that day when I travelled over it first, and there was always

a way between the hummocks if you troubled to find it.

Then round the flank of a small berg we came in view of the *Gleaner*. She was still beset ; but the hands were hard at work beating the ice from her rigging, and cutting a gutter round her in the floe, so that she might float clear when the time came. I tell you they knocked off sharp enough when we drove up, and there was Black stumping up and down on the poop, with his chin pink and clean shaved, just the same little round barrel of a man that ever he had been.

‘My goats!’ he raps out, ‘but it’s McTodd. Man, I thought you were dead as a decent Christian, but it seems you’ve turned savage.’

‘No more savage than yourself, Captain Black. I’ve been troubling myself over bear-skins, and I’ll ask you for seven shillings head money on twenty-nine.’

‘You’ve shot twenty-nine bears! Ye dissolute mechanic, you’re lying to me.’

‘As for lying, the skins are there, and you can count them for yourself. What’s brought me back to this disreputable old ship—I notice you’ve not kept the best care of her during the winter, Captain Black—is to see how those prophecies I left with you have been getting on.’

The old man fairly bubbled at me. ‘To blazes with you and your prophecies, you Jonah! They’ve all come off to the bitter last, and I’m for having no more. So hand up my bear-skins, and you can stay on the ice where you are now with your friends.’

'As you like,' said I, 'though my bear-skins stay with me. But being out here on the ice won't cure me of prophesying. I feel it coming on me again now. It's working up inside me fine. In another minute I'll be able to reel you out a list of prophecies that would make Job envious.'

'By goats! I'll stop you're tongue, you swine. I'll empty a gun into you!'

I believe the Old Man would have done it, too, if he had been let. But the crew were too frightened. The mates and harponeers got round and cooled him down, and presently he got his voice in hand, and hailed me civil.

'Here, you, McTodd, what's the best antidote for this infernal complaint of yours?'

'Christian treatment,' said I, 'and no ant-tobacco principles, or teetotalism, in that part of the ship where I have my abode.'

'Come aboard, my lad. You shall wash in rum if that's your cure, and you may blow away all the tobacco in the slop-chest. But the next prophecy you let drop, over the side you go with a brace of fire-bars at your heels. I'll make no mistake, and have you resurrecting a second time.'

So back over the *Gleaner's* side I climbed, and Amatikita and the other bucks brought on board skins, for which I should have drawn nigh on £15 if Black had not swindled me over supplies he said I'd had out of the slop-chest and medicine store. He was a very cannie man over the siller, was that same Captain Black, and I was obliged to give him my idea of Dundee and Aberdeen in that respect in a way he did not like. But a fat lot I

cared then. I'd a bottle or two of liquor under my belt at the moment, and I'd have given my views to the archangel Gabriel, yes, or to a stipendiary magistrate if either of them had come in my way.

I didn't even care when he as good as turned me out on the beach at the missionary settlement a week later. Caring is a matter for afterwards in these cases. It's after you've had your fill of guzzling and fighting that you begin to think of the old mother that is dependent on you, and it's then you call yourself extravagant names.

'Ay, laddie! ye spare yourself no evil names, then, when you're cold and sober!'

CHAPTER VIII

THE DUEL

IF there had been any way of getting out of it, you may be sure I should not have condescended to follow this man Ryan over that abominable Greenland ice. Employment ashore, especially employment in the Arctic, was always a violence to my tastes. I like warmth. I like to have the flavour of the sea and the flavour of engine-rooms in my teeth, and the longing for them both lives in all my bones. But there was no help for it here. Captain Black had parted from me in a cloud of blue language. He swore he'd rather have the *Gleaner* sunk than see the press of my greasy boots on her deck planks again; and so there was I as good as marooned at the beastly Danish missionary settlement.

Well, you'll say there's nothing in that; many a good man has been on the beach before; and I'll not deny I've tried it myself. But at that mission station it was a very different thing. Even the Esquimaux, without kayaks and hunting luck, they're not over pleased to see; but a white man

without money to lay out at the store they've no use for at all.

Now Mr. Ryan, of course, had this up his sleeve when he came to make his proposal to me, and whatever he'd wanted, I should have had to fall in with. I'd done three days' starvation in a wet mud hovel, and had a cough in me that I was frightened of. There were no snacks to pick up like you can find in other places ; the Esquimaux down there were desperately poor, and a white man was no luxury to them like he is up North ; and as for the white men of the place, they were a bitter, hard lot, who would sooner think of giving you a gun-load than a piece of meat. I'd tried the 'distressed mariner' dodge, and it was no use. There was no consul, and there was no ship going home, if there had been any. Besides, Black had poisoned all their minds against me.

'It strikes me,' said Ryan, when he came to me, 'that I am about your last hope, Mr. McTodd, and so I'll trouble you not to give me any more of your airs and graces.'

He had not an ingratiating manner with him, and perhaps you will say I stood a good deal on my dignity. I pointed out to him that I was a man of some family, and a very highly-qualified engineer.

'You may be a lineal descendant of the Stuarts for anything I care, and as for being an engineer, a harpist would be as useful to me. I've told you what I want. You can either take it, or go on with your starvation in this filthy, reeking hovel till it finishes you.'

‘Well, I accept, but on one condition. My pay, you said, was to be two pounds ten a week and all found. I want you to arrange to have it sent to Mrs. McTodd at Ballindrochater in Scotland. It’s long enough since I’ve found the chance of getting a draft into her hands, poor lady, and she’ll be needing it sorely. I shall no’ want any left over for spendings here.’

He lifted his eyebrows and shoved up his moustache. ‘So our Mr. McTodd has the domestic virtues remaining to him, has he, in spite of his down-at-heel appearance? My good man, is it not rather a risk to suppose your wife keeps you in memory? I should say the chances are she has found a successor to you.’

‘I have no wife. It’s my mother I’m speaking of, and, by whiskers! I’ll take my hands to you and pull your throat out if you talk uncivil about her.’

He blushed up to the eyes and bowed. ‘Mr. McTodd,’ he said, ‘I sincerely beg your pardon there. Mothers are sacred, or should be. My own is to me, and I like you all the better for what you’ve said about yours. A wife is another matter, but we needn’t discuss that, as neither of us seem to run one. And now, if you please, I’ve got something in my pocket which may be of service to you, and when you’ve made use of that, we’ll get to business.’

He handed me half a dozen biscuits and a great chunk of corned horse, and I think I never enjoyed a meal more, or needed one more keenly. The meat was beautifully fat, and you want it so up in

that bitter Arctic climate. And when he took out his flask and gave me the cup of it full of good strong whisky, I shook hands with that man, and told him I liked him fine, and told him, too, he'd my leave to say I said so.

The gale of the last two days had eased up a bit, and we went outside into the clean wet fog whilst I ate. I tell you it was a relief to be away from that filthy, rancid hut. It was the worst of all the village. It was too bad even for the filthy Esquimaux. Yet it was considered good enough by the missionaries and the other white men of that Danish settlement for Neil Angus McTodd.

I was considering over that last indignity, and feeling more than a taste bitter. Ryan must have seen something of this in my look. He nodded backwards at the hut, and said he : ' I should say, judging from the tone of that villa residence, you are not very particular where you go next, or what you do ? '

' For that two pounds ten a week you're paying me I'll follow anywhere you choose to lead, or anywhere your partner leads. '

' My partner ? '

' That whaler set down another Englishman here with you, didn't she ? The word went round you were in partnership over something, and from what you've said I judge it's exploring somewhere over this Greenland ice. '

Ryan turned away from me and laughed unpleasantly. ' Please understand, Mr. McTodd, that Lowthian and I are in no way partners ; in

fact, very much the reverse. I think that you had better understand that we are rival explorers. There is this glacier I told you about which drops out into the Davis Straits sea just north of Cape Smith. Only the coast face of it is known and marked. Its inland course is uncharted. It may have a definite track : it may merge into some great inland ice-sheet. Anyway, Lowthian and I can't agree at all about its origin. So we have made up our minds to explore it, personally and separately. We tossed up for position, and I won. So I shall explore along the glacier's southern flank, and Lowthian takes the north.'

'I see. Two expeditions, so that if one breaks down the other can help it.'

Ryan frowned. 'You don't seem very bright at catching a man's meaning, Mr. McTodd. I told you there was no partnership whatever between Lowthian and myself. At home, of course, we talked very big about the scientific interest of these expeditions ; but we're away from newspapers and people one knows in this God-forsaken hole, and I'm free to own to you that I care as little about the scientific aspects of Smith glacier as any man living.'

'Well, you'll not find much shooting very far in from the coast, if it's sport you're after. I've lived with the Esquimaux for a winter myself, and have got to know pretty well where the game is to be found. The bears are for the most part on the shore and on the floe, looking after the seal. The deer are in the corries at the back. They seldom go far inland. The musk cattle are very bad to

get now, but if any are left they will be down by the coast, too.'

Ryan snapped at his fingers. He was a very impatient man. 'Never mind the shooting prospects. I am not down here for that kind of sport. Neither is Lowthian. We have, if you like to put it that way, a sort of bet on. We're both going to start fair at the coast end of this Smith glacier, and then work inland at either side of it. We're going on and on till one or the other drops, and the man who doesn't, wins. Now do you see?'

He laughed very unpleasantly, and I laughed, too. I did not quite see where the wit came in, but I was not going to give myself away to an Englishman. So I said: 'It's a very humorous situation,' and, as I remarked, I joined him in his laughter.

He was a curious man, this Ryan. He pulled up short, and looked at me with a drawn face, and asked me queerly enough what I was giggling about. You don't see me getting caught though, like that. I just rapped out: 'Oh, very humorous, very humorous,' and laughed my fill, he still staring at me; and then, says I, so that he could not get back to his joking: 'We'd better discuss the ways and means of this expedition. You'll have to travel light if you're going far over the ice,' I told him, 'and be content to leave luxuries behind. You may say good-bye to pickles and all refinements like that.'

'Oh, I can rough it well enough.'

'It's as well, because you'll have to do it. To

whom belonged those cooking-stoves and frame-houses, and contraptions I saw put on the beach out of that old whaler that brought you? Perhaps they were Mr. Lowthian's?'

'No; they belonged to the pair of us. They were what the outfit people thought necessary, and so we brought them along. Lowthian and I are supposed to be chums at home. We were chums till—well, till quite recently; and, so far as any one at home knows, we came out to Greenland as partners, just as you supposed us to be. In fact, I only let out the fact of our rivalry to you, Mr. McTodd, in confidence, because I want you to assist me to win. So you quite understand it is in confidence?'

'Sir,' I said, pulling myself up, 'appearances and costume may be against me, but I was born a gentleman, and have some gentility left which is at the service of those who rely upon it.'

'Thank you. I'm sorry I've been so off-hand with you, but, to tell the truth, appearances are a bit against you here, and, not to put too fine a point on it, you've by no means the local reputation of an unsmirched lamb.'

'That's Black's nastiness. Black was my skipper on the *Gleaner*, and I'll not deny I must have annoyed him with a few prophecies. Besides, I proved to him he'd not shown a Christian spirit to me. It is awfully galling to a man that holds a position in the Free Kirk Black does, to be shown that he's deficient in Christian spirit. It's only natural he should be revengeful after that.'

Ryan laughed. 'You seem to be a queer hand-

ful, Mr. McTodd. Come to think of it, that same power of prophecy was held out to me as one of your most obnoxious points. Look here, can you put out your powers on my behalf, and predict me a win over this expedition?’

Now in spite of the fact that the man had recognised me as a gentleman, which should have been a great point in his favour, he was not one I could bring myself to like. He’d a nasty sneering manner with him, and the way he could clap on a mister in front of my name was often an insult in itself. I had no special cause to admire Lowthian. He had come to that filthy hovel where I lay, and looked me over through an eyeglass. ‘You’re the man McTodd they speak about, are you?’ he had said, and when I told him: ‘Yes, and could I do anything,’ he had shaken his head, and remarked that he would prefer Esquimaux.

You’d think that was enough to sour me against Lowthian, but it was not. I can admire a cool bossing manner like that in any man, and I’d him in my mind when I answered Ryan.

I shut tight my eyes, and struck out a hand like I’d learnt to do when I prophesied, and then let him have it. I foretold cold, gales, bad hummocks in the ice, sleet and fog. I got the smiles and the sneers out of him with that, and then when he had thoroughly chilled down, I shivered and said I didn’t like to tell him the rest.

‘Oh, out with it,’ says he. ‘You’ve been realistic enough so far. Let’s have the tag.’

‘Then if you really wish to know, ye must learn that I can see the two parties struggling on

and on through that bad ice and awful weather I've been telling you about, and getting weaker and weaker, till at last there's a white man dies, and though I can't see his face, it must be either you or Mr. Lowthian.'

'How do you know?'

'Because there are only three of us there, and I can see me helping to bury the dead one.'

Ryan slewed away, staring through the fog, and I heard him mutter: 'I suppose the beggar's a fraud, but, by Jove, he's got near the truth.' But then he turned on me with his usual sneer, and says he: 'Mr. McTodd, I'd have you know I'm the least superstitious man in the world, and you'll find your prophecies more appreciated elsewhere. Keep them for the ignorant skippers of whaling barques if you want them to be effective.'

'Oh,' I said carelessly, 'I ram them down no man's neck. I say only what's given me to say, and you can take it or leave it, and there's an end to it. But coming back to that question of luxuries we were at just now. If you want to make much progress you'll have to travel light, and it's my idea that the man who wins on this race is the man who's the pluck to rub nearest to starvation.'

'Ah, now that you're getting back again to practical politics, Mr. McTodd, I can appreciate you better. We'll get down to detail at once, please.'

'We did that same, and did it so effectually that two days later I'd got him started off, with most of his fine cooking-stoves and pick-axes and things

left in store at the missionary settlement, and I wondered a good deal if we'd ever come back to claim them! He'd cut down weight so much he hadn't even brought along a change of clothes. We'd hired an oomiak to take us North round Cape Smith, with seven strapping Esquimaux wenches to row, and an old worn-out buck to handle the steering oar, and there upon the beach was another oomiak with Mr. Lowthian's outfit. You see they were to do everything level till they got fairly started at the two sides of Smith glacier.

I thought there'd be no harm in seeing what kind of gear Lowthian had got, and so I lit my pipe, and strolled across to the other oomiak, which his women were just sewing a few final skin patches on, all ready to be social. But Lowthian was not having any.

'Here, my man,' says he, 'aren't you hired by Mr. Ryan? You'd better go and attend to him.'

'I have done that most thoroughly. I've invented things, and made things for Mr. Ryan in a way that would make your mouth water, if only you could see them.'

'I wish him joy of you; but please keep away from my people, they're busy with their work.'

'It's a free beach,' I said, and walked on. As he seemed to want to keep it hid, I was all the more anxious to see what was inside his oomiak.

'Look here! You keep your groggy nose out of this boat, my man, or you'll have it smashed.'

Well, you know me well enough to understand that I don't need a more pressing invitation than

that from any man. I hit out quick and heavy for the point of his chin, and he ducked and let me by like a professional pug. He dropped his eyeglass so that it flicked away loose to the end of its string, and stood just balanced like a man who knows the job. It was clear I'd come up against some good stuff, but I wasn't put out by that. I'm pretty useful myself, and a good, hard, equal fight is a thing a man can take a pleasure in. But we didn't go in and scrap straight on. This Lowthian he puts up his hand. 'Hold up a bit, my good fellow. Strip off your coat and then I'll lick you thoroughly, if that's what you're after.'

'You're a man I'd come some way to put up my hands to,' I said, and then I peeled, and he did the same. It was just beautiful to see his science. He hadn't the hardness of my tough old hide, but he'd an eye for every move, and he was as quick as steam. Moreover, we were both of a height, though I think he'd got a matter of three-quarters of an inch in the reach. So we went at it, ding-dong, give and take, first one down and then the other, fighting very fairly, but quite like gentlemen. I mean we never used our feet to one another, or tried gouging, or games like that.

His boatwomen sat on the ground round in a ring, and sang a missionary hymn, keeping time by slapping the soles of their boots, and a few down-at-heel Esquimaux loafers from the huts beyond, and a Dane or two came up to look on; but no one interfered, and I don't know when I've enjoyed a scrap more. He unbent one of my teeth, and I caulked up one of his eyes, and was

doing my best to stop the other. But he'd science, there's no doubt about that, and he must have been splendidly taught. After his eye was closed he let my face alone, and stuck to body blows. He found his mark over my heart, and kept plugging in on that, and I couldn't always stop him. He took a lot of punishment, though, first, and I was in hopes I could paste him sufficiently before he gave me my gruel.

But those heart blows tell. He gave me one last smack, and I came trundling down like coals going into a bunker, and they tell me it took best part of half a day to bring me round again. By whiskers! but it was a splendid fight, yon!

I came to my wits again in an oomiak, which was being rowed over heavy seas, and there was Ryan sitting on the strips of wood which lie over the skin which forms these boats' bottom, looking pretty blue and baling for all he was worth.

'So you are not dead, then? Rather stupid of you to come to life again, because we shall be swamped directly.'

I pulled myself up, feeling pretty sick and limp. I looked at the old buck who steered, and at the women who rowed. They all seemed cheerful enough. Then I took a squint over the gunwale. There was an ugly enough sea running, with a good deal of ice in it, which took some dodging, but the oomiak would live through it all right barring flukes, and I said so.

I saw what was wrong with Ryan. The cold, and the loneliness and the bigness, and the dreari-

ness of the Arctic was getting hold of him and making him ache, and I had fears that my employment at two pounds ten a week would soon come to an end. That wouldn't have suited me at all, for as you know, the poor old mother at home in Ballindrochater had had no remittance from me for long enough, and I was just about desperate over making money. So I pulled myself together a bit, and put a scheme before him.

'You are very keen on winning this bet?'

He looked up from his baling. 'I suppose I am,' he said drearily. 'But this beastly climate cools one. The thing that I'd set my heart on having at home doesn't seem so indispensable up here.'

'Man, have ye no pride? Are you going to give up at the first smell of a breeze, and the first touch of chill? Let me tell you yon Lowthian who's against you is a real tough. I've fought with him and know. If you're not ready to make a bitter hard strain for it, you'd better put up other arrangements.'

'What other arrangements can I make?'

'Do the expedition by deputy. There's an Esquimaux I know, Amatikita's his name, that'll have his summer camp somewhere on Cape Smith. We'll find Amatikita, and you shall stay and board with him. I'll get a dog-team, and a sledge, and a buck to help me, and go up the side of the glacier, and by whiskers! I'll put in a peg further East than Lowthian, if I have to go straight across to the other sea to do it.'

Ryan went drearily on with his baling—the

seas were coming over the oomiak's gunwale pretty free—but he said nothing.

'Well,' I said, 'it's not every man would make you an offer like that, and be competent to carry it out.'

'I know, I know, but that wouldn't necessarily fulfil the contract. You see, the essence of the bet is—that only one of us shall go home.' He gave a sort of bark of a laugh. 'Now do you see?'

I laughed too. I wasn't going to have him sneering at me like he always did when I didn't take up one of his jokes immediate. 'Oh, very humorous,' I said, 'very humorous. You'll one of you stay up here with the ice, and the other of you go back home and collar what you've bet about. It's a very humorous idea.'

'You needn't cackle like that. I'm hanged if I know where the fun comes in. In fact, I should say it's about the grimmest mix-up two grown men ever dealt with. The question is, can you arrange it for me? I'm hanged if I know how I can come to offer such a thing; I suppose the cold and the general wretchedness up here changes one. But I want to go back for—well—what we bet about, and if you can fix it, I'll make it worth your while. Come now, you say you're a poor man, and here's a chance of your earning £500.'

I suppose my brain must have been a bit dulled by the hammering I'd got, for it was only then I tumbled to what he was after. 'Ho,' I said, 'you want me to murder Mr. Lowthian, is that the little game?'

'If you must put it in brutal words, I suppose that's what it amounts to. I suppose your own ideas will run rather that way too, won't they, after the hiding he's given you?'

'Man,' I said, wagging my head at him, 'you've an awful poor idea of sport. That scrap I had with Lowthian cleared up any misunderstanding there ever was between us, and I love him like a brother for the way he can use his hands. Walk him down in fair struggle, I'll do, especially if there's £500 to be earned at the end of it, but if it comes to murdering, please observe I'd far rather scrag *you*.'

'You treacherous scoundrel!'

'Call no names. You could be killed, if it was my wish, by the lifting of a hand. These women who are rowing this skin boat would put you overside on the instant, and without question, if I gave the word, and once in that cold water that you're baling back into place, how long would you swim? Or again, once ashore, Amatikita or any of the other bucks would drive a lance through you for a handful of cartridges, and be glad of the bargain. You may be a big man at home, Mr. Ryan, you might have been a man of some esteem in that missionary settlement, but Mr. N. A. McTodd's your better here in this boat; and ashore, where we're going, let me tell you he's something very near a king.'

'If you chop round like that, you can cut my throat if you choose, I suppose, and really, I don't very much care. I ought to have taken warning by what Captain Black said about you. I ought

to have picked up a hint from Lowthian's refusing to employ you. But anyway I'm getting past caring much what happens now.'

Here was a curious view. I looked hard at the man to see what was wrong, and presently he stuck his head over the gunwale of the dancing boat, and gave me a clear demonstration. He was very sea-sick. At the same time he was suffering, as a newcomer does, from the bitter cold, and the wet, and all these things together which the Esquimaux in the oomiak thought nothing about, and I very little, came close upon daunting him utterly.

However, this man was my employer for the time being, and like him or not, a fellow's bound to be loyal to the hand that pays him. So I got a spare sealskin cover or two from the Esquimaux, and snuggled him up a bit, and took on the baler. The seas were coming over very bad just then, and I'd my work cut out to keep the oomiak free. In fact presently one of the women had to ship her oar, and turn to and help me. It was scaring, of course, for Ryan, especially when we got amongst a lot of broken-up floe ice that was smashing together like old glory, and kicking up Hades' own delight of a noise. But the buck at the steering oar took it all pretty cool, and he was good enough barometer for me. I remembered what a lot these skin boats can live through, and just told myself that fine pay like two pounds ten a week isn't earned for nothing.

I'm free to own that when it came to the point, that nasty race off Cape Smith as near as whiskers

did for us ; a breeze got up against the tide and raised a cross sea like a cliff ; and if we hadn't managed to get on to a piece of floe and ride it out there, we'd have been goners. Ryan asked me after Lowthian's oomiak, and I told him it was out of sight, and presumably swamped. But no such luck for Ryan. When the weather eased, and we got our craft into the water again, and pulled her into that bay at the back of Cape Smith, there was Lowthian and his outfit camped in Amatikitá's village, with the blubber fires making his hut as warm and homey-smelling as an engine-room.

We were all in want of a thaw-out ourselves, and presently we and all our oomiak's crew were lying stripped on a sleeping bench, and our crisp and sodden clothes were hung on the rack above the lamps, filling the place with a juicy steam.

There was no denying we'd had a bitter hard time of it, and Ryan saw fit to stay there a week to recruit. We were all reminded of the nearness of the glacier. Every now and again it would 'calve,' as they term it, and split off a thundering great iceberg with a noise like great guns firing, that would set the surf roaring for hours along the beaches.

It was not for me to complain, with my wages running on all the time, but Lowthian had got to sea again, and if we were to race him we should have been off too. But Ryan pointed out he'd got to work north to the other side of the glacier and find a landing there, and so we could afford to give him a bit of start. I'd my own idea about the

advisability of that naturally, but I said nothing till Ryan brought up the subject of that £500 again.

‘I can see,’ he said, ‘that you know this beastly country and its ways. My success is going to depend on you, Mr. McTodd, and so, if you want your bonus, you must earn it.’

‘Write that down on paper,’ said I, ‘so that there will be no forgetting it,’ and he did that, making the money at my request payable to Mrs. McTodd in Ballindrochater, and I got one of the squaws to sew the agreement on to my shirt with some fine sinew thread.

‘Now,’ said I, ‘we’ll start.’

‘No, to-morrow. There’s a gale blowing now, and the filthy weather may get finer in a dozen hours.’

‘We’ll start now. I can’t afford to risk £500. So come you shall, even if I have to drag you by the hair of your head.’

‘Are you daring to threaten me, you ruffian?’

‘Man,’ I said, ‘can you use your hands like Lowthian?’

‘No, I cannot.’

‘Well, between Lowthian and me there’s very little difference in skill, so you’ll understand I’m above your contract. There’s another matter, too; Amatikita here is all the same as my dog; if he sees any one attack me, he’ll slip a lance into them as soon as he would into a seal. You hired me as a servant, and here I am in a way your master: it’s a very humorous situation that.’

Ryan scowled at me, and it was clear did not

see the wit of what I had said. He'd a very poor appreciation of humour, had this Ryan. Moreover, he'd a very poor notion of handiness, which, of course, must always be the case with a man who has not been grounded in the shops like I was. He tried to help us getting the dogs harnessed, and the sledges made ready, and the teams hitched, but you could see he'd no notion of how a load would strain, and as for plain English words, he didn't even so much as know what a toggle was. So, as it was, he contrived to get himself very nearly worried by the dogs, and would have been quite if Amatikita had not whipped them off, and all he did to the sledges had to be redone after him. But he showed willing, and that was all right. I hate to have a sulky shipmate.

There were two teams and two sledges, the dogs well-braced into their skin harness, so that they could not kick clear of it, and each pulling direct on the sledge by its own trace. Amatikita drove me, and another buck, with a squint, had charge of Ryan, and away we went off through the cold foggy Arctic daylight, with the eighteen-foot whip lashes cracking like Tommies at rifle practice.

There was a cold draught blowing against us from the ice, and I had to look after Ryan's nose, or he'd have left it behind him before we'd been gone five hours. But the dogs were in fine fettle, and we made good travelling of it.

The ground, of course, was as uneven as you'd like to see, and a white man wouldn't have got over half a mile to the hour; but an Esquimau

has a wonderful eye for country, and Amatikita was a boss Esquimau. He squirmed that sledge in and out of the hummocks as if he'd been that way every day of his life, and when needs must he'd get his great whip to work and make the team pull us up places like the side of a house. The other buck brought Ryan's sledge steadily on in the wake of ours.

It was very few halts we did unless the dogs were dead beat. I kept hammering into Amatikita the necessity of beating Lowthian, and he quite understood. Like me, he'd a lot depending on the race. You see, he was not a fellow who'd been spoiled by living in the Settlements. He was as tough as pin wire, and he wasn't over-greedy about pay. He'd a cuckoo clock in his hut that had stopped squawking, and my bargain with him was that if he beat Lowthian and brought me back again safe to Cape Smith, I'd set that clock cuckooing again as natural as life.

Of course, I knew as well as you do that he didn't regard it as a mere clock, but had set it up as some kind of god, and would say his prayers to it regular twice a day. Fellows at home pointed out that I acted very wrong to Amatikita over that clock. They have dinned into me that my father was once Free Kirk minister in Ballindochater, and that I, as my father's son, ought to have converted Amatikita and all his household to the Free Kirk faith. But to do that, in the first instance, I should have had to prove to him that the clock was merely a common piece of machinery, and had no god or devil whatever

inside, and that would have upset Amatikita's usefulness at the first go off.

Ryan had offered him money, and it was no use to him ; he had offered him a gun, and Amatikita showed he had a good Henry rifle already ; and, in fact, if Ryan had been alone he would never have got that pagan gentleman to budge three miles from the coast of Davis Straits. So it was me with my knowledge of the native mind, and my handiness at mechanics, who, as you might say, saved the expedition.

Meat we were packing with us on the sledge to a certain extent, also blubber for the lamps. But you eat a mountain of a lot in that bitter climate, and, of course, there were the dogs to be fed, or we'd get no more work from them. We came across bits of thawed ground every now and again, with moss growing on it, and flowers, and coarse grass, and lichen, and on some of these we managed to shoot some deer, and once a musk ox.

Even with the Esquimaux and their dog-teams to help us, it was by no means a case of so many miles each day regular. In the Arctic it's the weather that's top boss ; and when gales came, and with them snow, we'd just turn to and build an igloo that the four of us could pack into, and stay in there and make warmth by close stowing, till the weather chose to ease. The dogs would howl outside, and try to scratch down the walls when they smelt the warmth of the green-stone lamp, and the gales would howl above the dogs. And inside there would be one Scottish engineer, ready to sell his soul for one bottle of good strong

new whisky. But alongside Smith glacier there was no market in souls just then, or rather, I should say, there was none where the buyers came provided with whisky as purchase money.

You are not to suppose, though, that we wallopped along by the side of the glacier all the time. Often the way was too bad, and the sledges had to swing off a matter of twenty miles to the south. But we kept to the westward direction, and when in the end the glacier disappeared, and was swallowed up into the ice sheet that fed it, there was Lowthian's outfit away to the norrard and level with us.

'My God!' said Ryan, when I pulled him out of his bag to see, 'he's not beat yet, and after all I've gone through!'

'We aren't at the other side of Greenland yet. The dogs can do a lot of pulling still, and when they're broke up we can take to our feet and walk. I don't know how much you're betting with Mr. Lowthian——'

'I thought I'd driven into your thick head this isn't being done for money.'

'Rub your nose,' I said, 'it's frostbitten. You'd no' have a taking personal appearance if you went home without the nose. As to the precise commodity you're wagering over, you can keep as silent as you like. I've not been told about it, and I haven't puckered my brain to guess. But I'll tell you one man that is here for money, and that's Mr. N. A. McTodd, and he doesn't intend to turn back till that money's won. So on we go again.'

Now it was clear enough to me that much further we should not get. We'd killed deer, as I have said, in the open valleys as we came across, but these were left far behind now, and there was no prospect of coming upon any more. Now and then we brought up with a nunatak, as they call it, a naked hump of rock sticking up through the ice and snow, but even these were as bare as a dock wall. There was nothing else near us but snow and ice, which neither cheer nor inebriate. There wasn't even a squawking bird.

The dogs were going slow, and looking lean and savage, and Amatikita and the other buck had pulled in their belts more holes than they cared about. I was forced to keep a gun always handy to prevent them from turning back. It grieved me to have to point a gun at Amatikita, and it grieved Amatikita, who only stood to win a mended cuckoo clock out of the whole racket, to see me do it. But there was no help for it. There, far away over the ice-field, was Lowthian's outfit pulling steadily ahead, and because he had licked me once, I didn't intend he should be top dog a second time. So I drove on Amatikita and the buck with the squint, and they shoved on the tired teams, and Ryan came along with us without either complaint or praise.

The weather got very thick then—it's most always fog in the Arctic when no snow's falling or there isn't a gale—and either we must have edged in towards the other crew, or they must have edged in towards us. Lowthian had only one team, but they were heavier brutes than ours, and more of

them, and the sledge was bigger and carried more meat. We were quite close together in the fog before we found it out, and if we were used up, I must say they didn't look much better.

Lowthian waved a glove at me. 'Hullo, McTodd, had enough of it yet?'

'Man, the trip's suiting me fine. If you'd give me the loan of a match to get light to my pipe, there's nothing more I could ask for.'

'How's Ryan?'

'Oh, he is all right. He's down in the cabin dreaming of his girl at home.' You'll observe I spoke humorously, Ryan being carried along like a log in his sleeping sack. But as usual with these English, Lowthian did not see my wit. He broke out into cursing and swearing, and I thought he'd have dared me to fight him again. And then at the wind up: 'If I ever hear that lady's name on your lips again, you blackguard, I'll just empty my gun into you, that's all. So you have fair warning.'

'A fat lot I care about that. And if it comes to shooting, I can loose off as nippy as yourself. If it comes to that, I've been sitting behind Amatikita this last ten hours with my gun ready, and here it is now. Yours is in the bag. So it seems I've the drop on you. Now what lady is this you're swearing about? I've mentioned no lady and know of none.'

'Poof! Ryan seems to have told you. Very bad taste on his part I call it. But you needn't lie about the matter to me any more, my good fellow.'

'The lie in your throat !' I shouted in a passion. 'I've told you nothing but the truth and a trifle of humour which you were too dull-witted to see. But we'll have Ryan out to palaver with you himself.'

I slipped off where I was, and went to the squint-eyed buck's sledge. Ryan was all huddled up in his skin sleeping-bag, with the top buttoned over his head. I called to him and shook him. He didn't answer, and I noted his shoulder seemed a bit stiff. The bag was crisp with ice, and with my fingerless gloves I was a bit of time unholing the buttons. But I got the flap turned back at last, and there was Ryan grey-faced and stark. Yes, and as cold as the ice-field beneath. 'And bang,' thought I, 'goes my poor old mother's £500 !'

'I've won,' says Lowthian, facing the dead man with a curious look.

'By no fault of mine. How was I to know he'd peg out like that ? And so I've lost.'

'I wonder if I've done well to win ? I don't know. But I'm glad he didn't. Yes, it would have been pretty hard work dying with the knowledge that I'd left her to him without obstacle.'

'Look here,' I said, breaking in, 'we'd better turn and get under weigh again. The less time we stay here the more chance we shall have of seeing the coast again.'

But he sat down on Ryan's sledge and started chucking his arms about, and singing the rankest nonsense you ever heard. He was clean off his head,

and when I started to argue with him, he stared at me, and then toppled over clean unconscious.

'Here's a bonny mess,' thought I. 'It looks as if we are going to have two dead men now instead of one, and then who'll be winner it will take a lawyer to decide.' But it would not do to leave him there in the open to freeze, so I put him in a skin sleeping-bag, and when we had buried Ryan in the snow, and set the teams going for the coast again, I got in beside him to keep him warm.

I tell you, it needed but very little whip to get those three teams started back for the coast. The poor brutes of dogs knew which way home lay as well as their betters, and they were game to pull as long as they'd an ounce of strength left. That inland ice-sheet had become an abomination to the eye and to all the senses.

I apologised to Amatikita for having driven him so far, and I could see he was mad. But I had no fear of him leaving me behind so long as he could drag himself. He'd got that cuckoo clock at the back of his mind all the time, and he knew that if I didn't get back to mend it, he'd have nothing to say his prayers to, and feel no better than the rest of the heathen round him.

So somehow or other we all struggled through till we got to the first valley where the deer were, though it was a close thing. But, after all, we were all right, and went down to the coast like gentlemen.

We got into the huts and took off our clothes and lay on the sleeping bench. Outside, the glacier

calved with its roaring noise, and the surf rattled on the beaches. Indoors, the kettles were filled and put over the green-stone lamps. And as for that clock, I fixed it up in three hours till it said Cuck-oo ! more natural than the living bird. There wasn't a more pleased man in all Greenland than Amatikita. You couldn't have found a more devout man in the Free Kirk Assembly.

We got into the oomiak again a couple of days later, and worked down coast to the settlement. Lowthian was all sound in health again by this time, and civil ; but he was a good deal run down, and his spirits were poor. But the night after we reached the settlement something happened which brightened him up very completely.

I had gone out into the open. It was midnight, and staring daylight. Of all unlikely things, there was a big steam yacht just come to an anchor in the roadstead, and a boat was pushing off from her. You can lay to it I went down to the beach. There was a lady in the boat, and as soon as they lifted her ashore through the wet, she saw me amongst the crowd of low-down Danes and Esquimaux, and beckoned me at once.

'You're English?'

'Scottish, m'em.'

'The same thing. Two English gentlemen came here two months ago, and they travelled far into the country. Can you give me news of them?'

'I was in the employ of one.'

'Which? Tell me quick. I have a right to ask about them. I am Lady Lowthian.'

‘I was in the employ of Mr. Ryan.’

She looked as if she was going to fall. ‘And you have come back here! Did both of them return with you?’

‘No, m’em. One of them stayed behind. He is there now—in the ice—in the middle of Greenland.’

Her throat was strained. Her fingers were twisting in and out. ‘Which of them?’ she whispered.

I do not know what possessed me to do such a thing, but I did not give her a direct answer. ‘Which do you want, m’em?’ I said.

She stared at me with big eyes. ‘If it is not Major Lowthian who has come back, I shall ask you to take me away on to the horrible ice where he has gone, and—and I shall stay there too. I have been very foolish. But I did not know there was mischief done. I only heard by accident what they came here for. Please tell me the news at once, however bad it may be.’

‘Mr. Lowthian is up yonder at the big log house, m’em, and if you’ll allow me——’

But she fainted that time in real hard earnest, and who should come down but Lowthian himself to pick her up? Finely he cursed me for ‘interfering,’ as he called it, which was very humorous when you come to consider the interfering I’d done.

I wondered then what the precise little game was she’d been having with Ryan, when the other gentleman was her husband, and she caring for him; and about that same I’m wondering now.

But I never learned. It must have been something pretty brown though, for men don't start out to fight a duel, which was what that little trip amounted to, in which one of them has got to be killed, all for the sake of a fancy, unless it is a fairly solid one.

CHAPTER IX

THE LATE ESQUIMAU POUT

'SCIENTIFIC discovery is all my eye,' said Captain Pout. 'I only took it because nothing else offered. I'd choke with the heat of a summer in Scotland. You see, Mr. McTodd, I've been voyaging up here in the Arctic for thirty-six years now, and I'm fit for nothing else. The old dad brought me to Davis Straits first when I was a bairn of ten, and in those days a 300-ton barque thought nothing of taking home with her the guttings of fifteen or twenty full-grown right whales. Those were times if you like. But the fishing's got steadily worse, and where there were fifty vessels in Greenland waters then, you'll find it hard to light on a couple now.'

'Well, Captain,' I said, 'all this is interesting and humorous as history, but I don't see where that job comes in that you talked about. Is it a billet of scientific observer that you have to offer me? I'll not deny that you see me in a way "on the beach" for the moment, and I'm parted from my certificates and testimonials for the time being. But I'm a man that was well grounded in the shops

to start with, and I have seen a lot of service in most kinds of engine-rooms since.'

'I count myself very lucky to have found you,' said Pout, and tapped me on the shoulder with his hook, which was a way he had. 'I'm convinced there's not another man in Greenland knows engineering like you do, and, besides, you understand the natives. I'll make your fortune, my lad. I want as much as I can get for my own missis and kids down in Hull, but you told me you've got a mother to support at home in Ballinsome—where, and you shall have £100—yes, a hundred giddy sovereigns as your own share. Come, now, I can't say handsomer than that. Have another suck at the whisky?'

Now, I daresay you'll think me a fool for not being more cannie about my bargain. Of course £100 was a nice sum. But there was I, not knowing in the least what labour or risk was demanded of me. You'll imagine, perhaps, it was the whisky that did it. But let me tell you it was not. There was not enough whisky in the igloo to make a man of my capacity feel even comic, let alone drunk. The fact was, Captain Pout gave me civility and deference; I told him I was a gentleman by extraction, and he respected me as such; and treatment like this came my way so seldom that you cannot wonder I was softened by it.

I know there are those who call Pout a bigamous old blackguard, and there is no denying that he married a good many more wives than would be approved of at home. But, then, he'd an

ingratiating way with him, and that stump arm of his, with the socket, which he could screw a fork, or a file, or a hook into just as he chose, the Esquimaux took for some kind of a god. He'd do tricks with that stump arm as clever as any conjurer you could see at a music-hall, and it's small blame to the Innuits, who haven't the advantages of going to entertainments of that sort, that they should believe it was something very much out of the ordinary.

We started off on our trip North in a hired oomiak, rowed by any women we could pick up. Captain Pout hadn't a wife in the missionary settlement, first, because he didn't want to do violence to local prejudice, and, secondly, because none of the women there were to his taste. The Esquimaux women of the settlement wore the tags and rags of European clothing to cover themselves with, they'd forgotten how to work, they could lie and steal equal to the Chinese, and if you knew them, you'd agree they were quite enough to make any man remain single, or at least, no more married than he was already.

But when we got away up-coast there was a different tale. I must say we lived very rough. Pout's Esquimaux name was a string of syllables as long as your arm. It meant The-Man-Hardest-to-Kill-in-the-Arctic-Regions, or words to that effect, and by whiskers! he did just live up to it. He was Esquimaux all over (barring the hook) in clothes, talk, habits, dirt, and appetite; and I had just to chip in and follow suit, or I shouldn't have been liked.

I managed it pretty well. I could talk the Innuït tongue free enough by this time, but the dirt was a thing I never could get completely used to. I just had to have a clean-up every fortnight or so, or I didn't feel wholesome. But I could sit a kayak with any man in Davis Straits, and as for making harpoons and lances, thanks to my thorough education in the shops before ever I went to sea, I could turn out such splendid specimens that they were always bought by the captains of whalers and other collectors to sell to the museum people at home. You see, I always carried round a small bag of proper engineer's tools with me, which gives one a great advantage in turning out these savage implements and weapons.

Travel in the Arctic is always slow, because you have to wait upon the weather, and besides, Pout was no man to tear himself away from domestic bliss too quickly. Indeed, when we came to a bunch of huts where he had connections, he was well enough pleased to stay there a month if he had been let, and go through his tricks, and take what was going. As I have said already, he had lived up in the Arctic so much that he was more than half Esquimaux at heart, and he had forgotten how to hustle as a white man should. However, he was not above persuasion, and presently, if you had watched and heard us, you'd have thought it was me who was master, and him the man.

Two days was my limit. Two days I'd let him sprawl naked on the sleeping bench of some sweltering hut amongst dirty Esquimaux, reeling off his

musty old yarns, and catching their laughter ; and then, if the weather outside was not too bitter, on we'd go again, threading along the coast to the North, dodging the gales and the south-going floe ice. It used to make me rather sick seeing his dirty old bald head pawed by the Innuït women, and his matted old grey beard fouled with the raw seal-blubber he'd been eating. But it was not because I was missionaryising that I tried to pluck him from these habits. He was too old and too well content with his nasty ways for that, so it seemed to me. But I'd my mother in Ballindrochater always vivid in my mind, and it was for her that I was keen to be quick and earn my pay.

Still, at that time I'd no more idea than you how that pay was to be earned. The one thing Pout could be dogged about, was the object of the trip. He'd let out no word of that for either threats or flattery. He'd look at me with a sort of cunning way he had, and scratch his nose with his hook, and wink. He looked more of a beast when he winked than any old man I ever saw. But he'd not throw down so much as a hint.

'Now, no offence, Mac, my lad,' he'd say, 'but just drop that subject till the time comes. If once the news got out as to what we were after, it would travel north quicker than we should, and when we landed there, you'd blame me for fooling you. As it is, there's but one man living in all the world who knows of the scoop, and that's me ; and the only quite safe way to keep it from being

spread, is to hold the knowledge where it is till the time comes.'

'But you might die, and then where'd I be?'

'You'd be left. So I give you the tip to treat me tenderly. You're hustling me along too quick, Mac. I'm an old man, and I want a nice spell of rest between journeys.'

Polite conversation between us just then was put to an end with some suddenness. The wind and some rip of the tide brought down upon us a whole fleet of crashing, smashing, bashing floe ice, and we were hard put to it to keep the oomiak from being crushed. One minute there was nothing for it but to jump out on to some piece of floe, and drag her up afterwards; the next, and our temporary island would be invaded by other ice rearing and splintering upon it, and bearing it down, so that we had to launch the boat again before the ice capsized. The spray and the racing spindrift of the gale wet through even our skin clothes, and the cold was very bitter. But the Esquimaux women who rowed us, and the old buck who steered the oomiak, seemed to think little enough of it; and Pout was equally tough and indifferent, and so I made shift to hide my exhaustion and discomfort, and work on stolidly, just as they did.

We had three days of this before we got back to the icy shore again, and the exposure would have killed any man new to the Arctic. But a fellow who had been as much as I had up North then gets hardened, and his finer senses of misery grow dull. We went on much in our usual

routine. Every day Pout got out his journal, and entered up temperature, barometer-reading, wind-pressure, and magnetic observation for the benefit of the Geographical Society at home that had sent him out. He didn't do this from instruments, of course, they being too heavy to carry. But he could guess at the figures pretty accurately through constant practice, and they were quite good enough for stay-at-home geographers to yarn and gibber about.

You'll say, why did he trouble to take this journal along? Why didn't he save labour, and fill up all the entries at one sitting? Well, that's been tried, and it's always dropped on. To look proper, each entry should be in a different handwriting. And besides, come to think of it, if a society does pay you to come out, it should have something it can be pleased and satisfied with for its trouble.

Still, with all our toughness and knowledge of the country, I'll admit it was nip and tuck with us more than once. The open water was very poor that season for oomiak travelling; ice abounded, and fogs pestered us abominably. Again and again we'd entirely lose direction through those dreadful Arctic fogs. But the Esquimaux ashore, when we found tents or igloos, were always pleased to see us, and if we lived rough, at any rate we lived wholesome when we were with them. And so in time we worked away North up the shores of Davis Straits, till we came to the spot where Captain Pout had his business.

Up till now he had been one of the most easy-

going old men you could find inside the Arctic Circle, but when the place got near that we had gone through so much weary travel to reach, the stiffening seemed to come into his back again, as though he remembered he'd once been a ship's captain, with power to swear at every one within sight. He put seal's blood on his cheeks, and let it cake on the dirt, and then peeled both off together, which is the Arctic way of washing. He even burnished the rust off his hook by way of extra refinement.

But still we did not come on to what he was looking for. The grey fog was dense and cold and unbroken, and we cruised about over an invisible sea, searching, searching. The loneliness of it almost daunted one. We seemed cut off for ever from our kind. All the way up the coast not even so much as a poor old whaler had we sighted, and only two kayaks of the Esquimaux. And now in this grey, clammy fog there was no sound of seal or even sea-fowl. There was nothing but green, cold water, and the ghostly grinding ice.

But not even here would Pout tell for what we had come so far, and endured so bitterly to find; and it was not till we caught sight at last of that great stranded berg that I knew that there was no need for us to struggle further to the Norrard.

'I began to be frightened it had broken adrift,' Pout said, as we coasted round the great ice cliffs trying for a landing-place. 'But I guess I needn't have been anxious. This berg's as firmly anchored as the North Pole itself.'

'But what's your game? You surely haven't

come all this way to measure an iceberg for your Geographical Society, and to take its bearings by the land ?'

He laughed. 'You're a droll creature, McTodd.'

I didn't see where the wit came in, but I was not going to say so. 'Yes,' I said, 'yon was a very humorous observation of mine, wasn't it ?'

We'd twice to row round the berg before we found a landing, and it was no short pull for the oomiak's women, as the great mass of ice was at least half a mile long, and nearly as much in width. But we found a cave at last, blue-lit from above, with a shelf of ice at the further end, and a sort of split running up to the high ice above ; and there we beached the oomiak.

'I don't mind telling you now, my lad,' said the old fellow, tapping me on the shoulder with his hook, 'that I've come here to salvage what's left of the *Gleaner*.'

'The *Gleaner* ! Why, Captain Black lost her last year. She was nipped, and they saw her founder. He and the crew saw her go down before they left in the boats.'

'Whose yarn was that ?'

'It went all over the beach at the settlement.'

Pout treated me to one of his indecent old winks. 'I shouldn't wonder but what they believed it themselves by the time they got down there. But the fact was they were fairly scared off her, and they imagined the "sinking," so that the people at home in Dundee shouldn't call them cowards. We Arctic skippers have our reputations to keep up like other people.'

'I know Black has several kinds of reputation to maintain ; I wonder he doesn't get mixed with them, there are so many.'

'You're a man that hates Black, I know ; but for myself I do not blame him. His old barque was beset, and she was badly squeezed. There's no sound that daunts a sailor more than to hear the ship he's in going *c-r-u-n-c-h* like a stepped-on matchbox, though often enough it does little harm to her seaworthiness. So they provisioned the boats and got them over the side, and pulled them to the nearest open water. The pack ice ground and heaped itself around them as high as houses. They got down to the water and launched the boats. A gale came on full of sleet and snow. They were blown away south. A great berg that was in their neighbourhood turned the turtle, and raised a sea like a cliff, and filled the air with noise past belief. Now I ask you, Mac, does it take very much imagination to have seen through the drifting snow the old packet take her last dive before they drove out of sight ?'

'It does not. But you speak feelingly. At one time I take it you'll have known what it was to have lost a ship yourself ?'

'I did, Mac, I did. I wasn't always an old beast that lived with the natives, and submitted to be driven by a dissolute mechanic like—well, we'll drop all this, and get to business. No one could find the *Gleaner* who did not come to look for her.'

'How did you know she was here, anyway ?'

'I was on the cliffs above the shore there,

hunting for fossil ivory, and saw the whole breeze. I'd a hut up there, and was in no hurry. If I'd been on board her, and gone off in the boats, probably I should have seen as little as her people did, and been equally ready to swear with them I'd seen her sink. But, as it was, I saw entirely what happened. There was a tongue of ice beneath her keel, and when the berg capsized, she was lifted with it two hundred feet into the air. It was all a matter of luck, McTodd.'

'Great luck,' said I, humorously. 'But I'll tell ye exactly how great when I see the ship. I've a notion she'll be so much out of repair—if, indeed, she's there at all, that I'll take £50 down if you'll give it me now, and let you off the balance of my pay.'

We were clawing our way up to the top of this huge island of ice all during this talk, and only spoke as it were between pants. The way was abominably difficult. The berg rose in great green spires and white plateaux. It frowned with cornices. It was a rabbit-warren of caves. Underfoot it gave gleaming rinks, and open lakes, and morasses of half-melted snow. Sea-fowl mewed amongst its crags, and seals sculled round its shores. Squalls whistled through its ravines that bit into one's bone with their chill.

For travelling over, it was the worst island imaginable. Cliffs met you at every turn, great cliffs of clear ice and clouded, streaked together like bacon. And when you had swarmed a cliff, you had to get across a crevasse. We had an axe with us to cut footholds in the ice walls, and

but for that axe we could never have got a hundred yards from our landing-place.' Even with the axe, nothing short of finding the *Gleaner* and realising on her would have made us undergo the risk and the labour. Our progress was one series of marvellous escapes.

But Pout was turning into a very different man from the "Esquimau Pout" of the last few weeks. His soft, easy language had quite dropped away from him. He swore at me so natural that it was quite a pleasure to hear him. I dropped into calling him 'Sir' and 'Captain,' just as if I'd signed on in the usual way and he was my regular skipper.

He was a man well advanced in years, and he had lived a desperate hard life. He was crippled, moreover, by the loss of his arm. But to see him clambering over those abominable ice walls and fissures, you'd have thought him some young spark fresh from the *Conway* playing front monkey at follow-my-leader. I'm a fellow myself that will yield to few in endurance or activity, and up to now if you had told me that Esquimau Pout was a better man than Neil Angus McTodd, there would have been a fight. But once we were on the berg I own freely he was the man that kept us going. If it had been me I should have turned it up after the first quarter of a mile, and the *Gleaner* might have been there still.

But, as it was, we clawed, and slid, and scrambled on, and when we were about mid-way on the berg, and stood on a great plateau, a good thousand feet above the ice-sprinkled sea that beat in noisy

surf against the cliffs of our island, there was the old whaling barque almost bang below us. So close was she that, with the bit of a list she had on her, I could have tossed my fur cap into the crow's nest at her mainmast head.

Her spars were all standing, with sails bent on the yards. Her decks were well masked with snow, of course, and her bilges were drifted up, but there was nothing to show that she was the worse for her treatment, except one pair of davits were bent, and the boat in them was smashed to splinters. Three other davits were empty, showing where the boats had swung that her people went off in, and the whale boats on the skids were gone also.

We clambered down to her, risking our necks a score of times. We climbed up on the decks of her, and looked around us, just figures of curiosity. Probably no two men have ever before looked upon a barque of 400 tons, seemingly sound, perched up on an ice cradle two hundred feet above water level. Captain Pout scratched his head with his hook, and chuckled and swore, to all appearance the most pleased man in all Greenland or the adjacent waters. But he soon pulled himself together. The decks were a mere street of snow, level with the to'-gallant rail. Fore and main companion slides had been left open, and some fine quantity of snow had drifted below and half-filled both cabin and forecastle. But Pout digging with one hand, and picking with his hook, and me digging with both gloved hands, we soon had a burrow made through this.

Things were in a bonny litter below. You might have expected that from the hurry her people left her in. But there were no signs of a nip. We got off the lazareet hatch, which was in the pantry floor, and searched below. She seemed sound there, too. We got into the engine-room and forepeak, and still there was nothing to discourage one. She'd a little water in her to be sure—ice it was then—but a whaler straining and bashing amongst the floes always makes a tidy sup, so there was nothing to show what you might call a leak.

The sights and smells of shipboard came back to me with a pleasantness I can hardly describe. In the engine-room, the nearness of even that whaler's poor old scrap-heap machinery affected me almost to the point of tears. And when I thought of a plate of boiled salt junk that I'd seen throwing about on the pantry floor, and that keg of rum which Black kept locked up in the lazareet, I wouldn't have changed places with a lord mayor sitting before turtle.

As for the Esquimaux in the oomiak, I had no more care for them than you would have had. Like ducks, they were used to sitting on their tails on cold ice, and I told Pout so when he bade me go back and fetch them up. He used injurious language to me, but a fat lot I cared. He was too old to fight, and as for swearing, it was a pleasure to see he had so far remembered his position again as to use his tongue as a man should who holds a master's ticket. Besides, I had lit the cabin bogie, and the warmth of it, and

the roar in the stove pipe, and the feel of a bit of good, hard, dull steam-coal in my fingers again, came to me as beautiful as a young girl's song. My whiskers! yes, and you'd know why, if you'd been crouching over reeky greenstone lamps loaded with putrid blubber as long as I had then. You never properly value coal and Christianity till you've been through times like those.

Pout went out again over the berg, cursing melodiously, and I set to work clearing the cabin of snow, and tidying down. A man doesn't understand the luxury of a shipshape room till he's lived for months like a beast in open boats and Esquimaux igloos. I even believe I couldn't have kept myself from painting too, if I could have found brushes and a pot of white lead. But I did get a couple of handfuls of cotton waste from an engine-room locker, and you've no idea how homey it made me feel again. I kept squeezing and fingering that waste like a girl does her doll.

In due time the old man comes back with the six Esquimaux women and the buck who'd steered the oomiak. 'Why do I find the fore-castle still cold and unattended to, Mr. McTodd?' asks he.

'For what do you want the fore-castle? There's room here for twice us.'

'Where's my crew to sleep?'

'With their betters, I suppose, as they have been doing this last five weeks.'

'Ye dissolute mechanic, d'ye think I'll stand those promiscuous habits aboard here? Away

forward with you, and help them get fixed up in berths in the forecabin.'

'Ay, ay, sir. And am I to take Mrs. Pout along there, or do you choose that she should bunk aft?'

He made as if he would have torn my face with his hook, but I held a coal scoop ready, and he stood off. He'd an awful poor appreciation of humour at times. 'I divorce the creature,' he screams out. 'I call you to witness that she's a divorced woman from this moment, and if you ever mention her name in connection with mine, I'll swear it's you that's been her husband for the last four years. Try to rake up my days of misfortune against me, would you, you dissolute beach-comber? I'll have to let you know, and quick, that I'm captain when I'm aboard this packet, and that the man or the woman that tries to be too familiar to me is going to taste gehenna.'

As I remarked before, it was quite a pleasure to hear him begin to respect himself again, but it was plain to see that the Esquimaux were not so well suited. They talked to him sharply enough in their own tongue, and he answered them back in sour, hard English. He seemed to have forgotten the Inuit language which yesterday he might have been born to. It was a very humorous circumstance.

However, I got the Esquimaux forward, lit the stove for them, fished out a good fat block of salt pork from the barrel in the galley, and left them frying it in a coal-shovel over the fire. I

brought them a kidful of biscuit, and a cake of slop-chest tobacco all round, and went on deck again. I slid the cover on the companion and made fast the hasp by way of precaution. I'd a notion we might find these natives missing if they saw the way clear, after they had their fill of meat and sleep. Then I went aft, took off my boots and cap and coat, and turned in in one of the mates' berths, and snuggled up under all the blankets I could find. Great whiskers! but it is luxury to have your spell of bed with all proper refinements.

A man that's learned to stand and watch in engine-rooms gets out of the way of putting in very big spells of sleep, and it was not long before I was stirring again, and well refreshed. The little room was dark and pretty strong smelling, and so I reached out an arm and slid open the door which gave into the cabin. The sight in there was enough to give any one the jumps. Pout was standing up looking at himself in a glass. He was in the act of fitting on one of Black's shore-going dickeys, and as the collar was too small for his great bull neck, he was coupling the two button holes of the collar with a bit of spun yarn. He'd washed too, all over, as you could see by the colour of the water in the bucket beside him. His beard he'd already clipped to a torpedo point. He'd a brawn-new suit of slop-chest pilot-cloth on that really was not much too small for him, and he'd his feet in some yellow carpet slippers of an excellent pattern and tint.

He heard the squeak of my door, and slewed his head. 'Mr. McTodd, if you'll turn-to and cut my hair, I shall be obliged to you. I put back the scissors in the medicine chest under the table. You'll find them there.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

I turned to, found a comb and the scissors, and gave him a first-class crop all round, and to top up, found a little ointment in one of the medicine chest jars which did capitally for pomatum if you warmed it slightly at the stove. I'd left just the right number of hairs to comb across the bald top of his crown if they were properly stuck down.

'Now, sir?'

'Thank you, Mr. McTodd. I've needed that hair-cut for some considerable time. A man can't respect himself properly, so my wife says, if he neglects the requirements of the toilet. You're looking a pretty average dirty beast yourself. You'd better see what duds you can find in the slop-chest. I've put some snow on to melt in the galley, and you'll find the soap beside the bucket there.'

'The clothes I have on are suitable for the climate. Before I cast them I'd like to know what's to be done next? And at the same time, whilst you're talking, you might tell me when I'm going to earn that £100 of pay and how it's to be done.'

Here was Pout, the ship's captain, standing before me at once.

'You'll earn your pay, my man, by helping me

to get this packet into the water again, and navigating her to a home port. If you prefer to do that dressed as a savage I will not hinder you.'

'Get her back to the sea! Are you going to fit the barque with wings then!'

I meant to be humorous, but as usual he failed to see my wit.

'I'll have none of your impudence, you lout. Get away out of here. Just turn-to at the galley, and cook me a breakfast.'

You may think that I felt nervous finding myself so far away in the bleak, desolate North in such a position. But a man who has worked all my years at sea is always content to trust to his captain, when once he has convinced himself that he is a captain. I was quite satisfied in my own mind now that Pout had completely shucked off his disgusting Esquimaux habits, and was once more a thoughtful, resourceful, strong-worded shipmaster. So I gave my brain no useless exercise, and concluded to look after my own creature comforts, which had been too long neglected. You'll hardly credit it, but it was getting on for two years since last I had put my teeth into plum duff, and as for vinegar and pickles, and such luxuries as those, my palate had almost forgotten their taste.

Still, for all that, and though I was a high-trained engineer, even if I had given a thought to this matter, I do not believe I could have forecast Captain Pout's scheme for getting the *Gleaner* afloat once more in the seas of Davis Straits. He

spread it out to me that very morning after breakfast.

Said he : 'I'm going to launch this barque, as I told you, Mr. McTodd. I surveyed the berg with the eye before ever I brought you up here, and I am convinced that what I purpose is possible. She's powder on board, and she's saws and axes. Our business is to cut a canal through the ice to lead her to the cliffs above the sea, and then launch her down into it.'

'Man, all the population of Greenland could not cut such a canal down to the water's edge.'

'I know. She must dive from the cliff head. She is very stout built, and it's my belief she would stand it.'

'Speaking as an engineer, properly qualified, what you suggest is quite impossible. Besides, it would be most unprofessional to attempt it.'

'Speaking as Captain Bart M. Pout,' says he, glaring at me, 'there's a thing that calls itself an engineer on this berg that's asking to stay here and freeze.'

'Not a bit of it. When tired of the entertainment here on the berg, I shall take oomiak, and get the Esquimaux to paddle me down coast again. And if you're a sensible man, skipper, you'll come along, too. I may tell you, as a practical mechanic, that you've bitten off more than you can chew this time. The old barque's a fixture where she is till the berg breaks up.'

'Now you hear me. If you're counting on that oomiak you may give it up. I'd no mind till you gave tongue that I'd a white man with

me who was a coward, but I thought the natives might want to give me the slip when they were set to work, so I've fixed things so as to keep them here. I just clapped my hook into the skin sides of that oomiak, and ripped them like so much paper, and then launched her off into deep water, and it's sunk a hundred and sixty fathoms she is this minute. You can't weigh her, and you can't get off without her. You're here on this berg, and, by thunder, your only chance of seeing Bally-what's-it's-name again is to stand by and help me to sail ourselves to Scotland in the *Gleaner*.'

Well, there's no denying that there I was, in a manner of speaking, pinned; and the prospect did not please me. I've lived pretty rough most of my time, and have risked getting wiped out on more occasions than I care to think about. I knew each time it was wrong to take the risks with a poor old mother depending upon me. But that was the way I was built; and, besides, as often as not it was the drink that forced me into it. But on that stranded whaler, perched high up on that grim, cold berg, even with four fingers of rum inside me to help me towards a rosy view, I saw no prospect ahead but eventual starvation.

However, there is nothing like cornering a man if you want him to do his utmost for you. Pout owned himself helpless. He said his contribution was the bold central idea. He didn't pretend to see his way through the details. He had brought along with him an engineer to re-

launch that whaling barque for a fee of £100, and on that engineer he depended.

To my mind, it seemed that the lives of the whole of the iceberg's crew, whites and Esquimaux both, hung entirely on the engineer, and the responsibility made me so nicely regulate the supply of rum which my system required, that my indicator showed the highest co-efficient of work and invention that it had yet marked.

I blew in the engine-room forge and ended up bars into crows and picks. Then I put on my furs again, and went and surveyed the berg between the barque and the water. There were great ice mountains in the way that nothing but a miracle could remove. But when starvation is the alternative, if you've had a good grounding in Clyde-side shops, you can do miracles. They were done then.

Seventy-six North we were in, and the cold was very bitter, even for an Arctic summer. The berg seemed to be stored with cold, and to give it out for our especial torment. Pout and I worked to keep our circulation on the move as much as anything else. The Esquimaux worked because they were afraid of a three-quarter-inch spanner which I carried in my pocket. It is not considered genteel at home to offer women a beating with a three-quarter-inch spanner if they don't work to your liking. But these women were Esquimaux, and wore pants like men, and so had to do men's work. That's where the humour of a petticoat comes in.

There was no slacking off for any one. The

skipper made a sort of pick, which he screwed into the socket of his wooden hand and shovelled with the other. Even the late Mrs. Pout had to do her whack, which she took very much amiss, thinking, I suppose, that she ought to have consideration, owing to her recently widowed condition.

We made burrows in the ice mountains that blocked the way, and loaded blasting powder into them, and sent the stuff flying. The whole berg shook with the firing every time, and Pout said we should split it or send it adrift, and it would turn turtle again, and we and the whaler should be swamped. I said to him that I should be very much surprised if all these things did not come off exactly as he feared, but all of them had got to be risked. I said he should have considered out these probabilities earlier.

The humorous part of it was that I was not very much minding the risks myself by them. You see I was obliged to make frequent references to the rum keg to stimulate my imagination, and by degrees I began to find the firework exhibitions vastly entertaining, and to dance and throw up my hat when the mass of the berg was wrung by one of my blasting-powder earthquakes.

Only once did Captain Pout attempt to interfere with my method. The rum keg was in the lazareet. When I went down for my dose there was the lazareet hatch padlocked.

I went to Pout. 'Where's that key?' I said.

'In my pocket, ye dissolute mechanic.'

'Is that your last word?'

'Tis.'

'Then, good-night to you. I'm long wanting a rest.' With which I turned in, and slept like a babe for four hours, laid awake for four, slept for four, and was ready (as I told Pout) to continue the series as long as he chose to remain unreasonable.

For a whole day Pout endeavoured to manage without me, but the only mine he fired miscarried, and nearly blew him to bits, and so he came to the room where I lay, and flung the key at me together with a regular bucket-load of hard language. It was a splendid certificate of competency for me. And so once more I turned to, and gave all my genius to the work.

Now, to describe in detail how I cut that gutter to the cliff edge would not interest you, as you are not educated sufficiently to understand engineering difficulties and refinements. But there the thing was at last, after incredible labour and genius; a road that you might call smooth, and sloping at an angle of forty, with the *Gleaner* at one end and a sixty-foot cliff at the other.

Arctic ships are made that strong that they can ram an ironclad and get no hurt. The *Gleaner*, for instance, was eight foot thick of solid oak in the bows of her. But a barque of 500 tons is not made for diving from a sixty-foot cliff, and mellow though I was with rum at the time, I was not inclined to take a rosy view of our chances. But Pout faced the risk with a nerve of brass, and as for the Esquimaux, they feared my three-quarter-

inch spanner a heap more than they did anything else terrestrial.

The great thing was, we were forced to take the dive with her. If only we had owned a boat, we could have sent the barque off first, seen how she stood the shock, and then have joined her afterwards, if all right, or (in case of disaster) have worked our way down coast. But Pout had put a stop to this by sinking the oomiak, and as he faithfully promised to murder any one who tried to make another, none was built.

We sent down to'-gallant masts, boarded-up skylights, made everything fast on deck, and, in fact, did all we could to improve her chance.

The Esquimaux (poor souls, not knowing what game was to be played) were sent below and the forehatch battened over them. The barque lay bows on to the slope, with all the ice cut away round her, so that she would slide off as soon as she was started. I'd put a small charge of powder in the ice beneath her stern post, so as to give her the final kick off, and when all was ready I fired the fuse of this, and climbed aboard as quick as you'd want to see.

I slammed on the companion slide, shut the doors, and got below. The Old Man was sitting on the locker which ran round the counter, jammed in between that and the cabin table. But that was not good enough for me. I went to my state room, got all the blankets I could find, climbed into the narrow bunk, and wrapped them round me. We were in for a big shock, and I wished to take it as well padded as might

be. And afterwards, if the old barque was swamped (which seemed likeliest), I'd a mind to drown warm and well tucked in. I lit my pipe and sucked it hard. It might be the last smoke I should get. You never can tell in these days of theological uncertainty.

Then bump went the mine. The old barque lifted bodily beneath me, and then I felt her slide forward, jarring and slishing over the uneven ice. She canted over on her bilge, and I heard the ice grind against her keel, and against the oak of her sheathing. From somewhere forward came the sound of the Esquimaux squalling in fright. From the cabin outside Captain Pout cursed at the reek of my tobacco smoke. For myself, I puffed hard at the pipe, so as not to waste any of the charge.

Slish, grind, bump, crash, tinkle came the noises as the barque tore her way down the channel, and then a sudden silence as she shot from the edge and took the air. That moment of silence almost daunted me. My heart stopped to listen to it. The pipe hung unsucked between my lips. Would she burst when she lit upon the water?

It seemed like it. *Crash*—she hit the surface of the sea, and every timber in her gave its own especial squeal? Great waves thundered on the decks above my head. Water came squirting down through the boarded-up skylight, and through the companion, green and solid. I pulled hard at my pipe. My whiskers! I did seem to want these last few draws.

It rather surprised me to find that I did not

drown, and presently, when, after a deal of violent rocking, the vessel settled down to a gentle roll, I threw off the blankets and stepped to the floor. There was a good slop of water there still, but it was draining away. The Old Man came out past me and ran up the companion. I followed him out on deck. She'd been well swept, and that was a fact, but no material damage showed except that the jibboom was carried away, and the bridge unshipped. She was being slowly sucked back again towards the berg, and this had to be stopped at once. So we set loose the Esquimaux, got the two topsails on her with some trouble, and so had her under command.

Then we had time to look about us a little, and to decide as to whether she would continue to swim, or whether she had contracted leaks which would be too deadly to keep under. There was no need to sound the well. I just nipped down into the engine-room and looked for myself. There was an ugly sup of water knocking about that appeared very cold and black and inhospitable, and, thinks I, this will get none the pleasanter for being looked at.

She carried no donkey boiler. It was a case of main boiler, and so I lit the fires and cursed them all I knew. Never was there such a sluggard to make steam. It seemed an hour before I could get the blast on to help the draught. But meanwhile the water did not gain on her, and when at last I'd got fourteen pounds, and could put steam into the bilge pump, I'd that sup overboard before you knew what was how.

Every now and again the Old Man came and watched me through the engine-room skylight, and when he saw plainly how sound she was, he pretty nearly sucked his hook soft with pleasure and congratulation.

Well, seventy-six degrees north in Davis Straits was no place to loiter in then, with winter crowding down on us, and night beginning to appear instead of twenty-four hours day, and bay ice forming whenever the swell ceased a bit. By a stroke of fortune the old packet had burned little of her coal, and there was a fine store, both in bunkers and holds, and oil-tanks. Sail her we could not, because, whaler-fashion, she carried single topsails, and needed a heavy crew to handle her. But you can hammer anything into firemen and trimmers if only you set about it right, even female Esquimaux. So steam her we did, and pushed south at a giddy five knots when it did not blow a nose-ender.

It was a strain, of course, for the engineer, because scrap-heap engines like the *Gleaner's* take nursing, and any one could see it was a situation which required plenty of stimulants. But I repudiate what Pout said afterwards. I was not drunk all the way home, or near it. I didn't take enough to make me even comical. And even he cannot deny that I drove that old packet's engines to perfection, and made those Esquimaux women fire and trim as though they had been bred in gaol, and had used a shovel ever since.

Pout said he stayed on deck all the voyage, but I doubt it. He'd the old buck Esquimaux

to spell him when the weather was fair, and that pagan could take a wheel as well as a P. and O. quartermaster. But with me, I'd no relief; I'd to stand watch and watch; and if I did snatch ten winks of sleep, it was sitting on the waste-locker, ready to spring into wakefulness on the instant.

It was Peterhead we got her into at last, and how long we were on the way I do not know, but it seemed years; and when we did get her tied up at last, and Pout gave me a few pound notes on account, well, I'm only human, and if you say you wouldn't have done the same in my place, all I've got to remark is, 'I shouldn't believe you.'

However, a jamboree of that kind has to end when the money does, and after four days I went to find Pout. My whiskers! though, but what a swell was there! Square-topped hat, hair cut and oiled fit to kill, high-heeled boots, and gloves!—actually gloves! He'd got a quaker hand made to fit into his socket instead of the hook, as delicate and refined as you could wish to see. It was half the size of his other great flapper. And the white Mrs. Pout and family from Hull were boarding with him at the temperance hotel where he stayed.

But when it came to getting my balance, there was the Dundee Scotsman at once. He said he owed me nothing. He said if I didn't clear out quick he'd call a slop, and have me run in for attempting to obtain money under false pretences. And then he called me a miserly Scot to ram it all home.

Well, knowing me as you do, you'll be surprised that I didn't make a row. But I guessed Pout was ready for that, and so I sheered off. That evening I came back with the late Mrs. Pout in tow. We sat down on the doorstep of that temperance hotel, and the lady sang a song. The tune had only two notes in it, and some people might have called it monotonous. A crowd collected. I intoned 'Amens' at the end of each verse. Presently Pout came out himself and raged at us.

'Tell that filthy pagan to stop, McTodd.'

'Ay, ay, sir. But when she stops I shall give these people here a translation of the words. You know them, I think. They describe some of the weddings of an old beach-comber they call The-Man-Hardest-To-Kill-In-The-Arctic-Regions.

'You beggar, if you do!'

'Pay up then, old fist-in-the-grave.'

He got notes out of his pocket-book and gave me £100.

'Now then, Captain Brigham Young, £10 more for the woman, and you see the last of us.'

He gave that too, and I saw her well-bestowed.

Then I sent the £100 to my mother in Ballin-drochater before it began to melt, and the next day was off to sea again. I laughed when I signed on to think how nearly Pout had been to diddling me. But that next trip was very ordinary plain sailing, and would lend no ornament to these memoirs. I shall skip it, therefore, and go on to where I again joined the *Gleaner*.

CHAPTER X

THE ILLICIT SEALER

WHEN a boatswain comes round to the boarding-house you are in, and asks you privately to join a vessel, you can lay to it there's something in it not quite straight and above-board.

I didn't know the man even by sight, and he knew me only by reputation, he said. Moreover, he'd tell me nothing definite. He said : 'You're used to the Arctic, Mac, and they tell me you're a regular hard case ; and being a Scottie, you should like the siller. I want you to be shipmates with me on the *Pole Star*.'

'Why, she's the old whaling barque *Gleaner*, rechristened and turned yacht. I was seeing after the chief engineer's berth on her only this morning, but I hadn't a good enough ticket for them. I said I'd driven those engines drunk, sober, and asleep, and never made a mistake in nursing them, and told them that any two men there couldn't turn me off the ship. They did with four though.'

'More fool you to fight. But just you put your pride in your pocket, and go and sign on as second. They've signed on a chief, and he's a

fixture, I guess. They'd signed on a second too ; but he's been talked to, and won't sail ; and so there's the berth open, and you'll be missing the one chance of your wet and wicked life if you don't take it.'

He laughed as he spoke, and I laughed too. I didn't see where the wit came in, but I was not for letting him find out that. 'Oh, that's humorous,' I said, 'very humorous.'

He rather stared at me. 'You seem to know your way about, old buckstick.'

'Very humorous. Man, but you're a comical fellow.'

'Now you drop it,' he snapped, 'and go and hang yourself up and get dry. Are you going to join?'

'It's sheer waste of good talent for a man of my experience to be associated with scrap-heap engines like those, especially in the subordinate position of second engineer. But under the circumstances, as I have no other employment offered, and am hungry to be away up amongst the ice again, I'll consent to sail with you.'

'Save us ! What a tongue ! What a preacher ! I guess you must have been bred down from a parson.'

'Why !' said I, in big surprise, 'whoever told you that?'

'Oh, stow it,' said he, and flung out of the room, muttering.

Now although I was, in a manner of speaking, on my beam ends, it is likely I should not have joined this *Pole Star* if it had not been for the

boarding-house keeper, who behaved in anything but a gentlemanly way. It was plain he'd been got at by this boatswain, Kemp. He said I'd been in his house long enough, and he didn't care if he never saw me again. When I'd first come in flush after being paid off, he was civil enough to have blacked my boots for me, and he said, without being asked, that he liked my singing fine. But now he must have it that I'd a voice like a sick crow. The fact was, I'd outrun my tick, and he wanted to touch my advance note.

I used all the language to him I knew, but it was no use. He wouldn't fight. He carried a life preserver ready in his hand to lay me out if I offered to touch him; and when I finished up by telling him that his wife was no lady, he just said: 'I don't know how you should be a judge.' The other chaps round sniggered at that, and I cleared out. I don't stay to be laughed at.

Well, about the first two or three days at sea on the *Pole Star* I can tell no tale. But after that we started to straighten down in our places, and I began to see that whatever the wages might be, this was going to be a comfortable ship to live on. Barring the captain, who grubbed aft, we two engineer officers, the mates, the boatswain, and Chips had a mess-room to ourselves, and lived as high as you'd want to see. There was every luxury, and no stint. Lump sugar, pickles, jam, were there for the asking. There was good, strong-tasting butter on the table every meal, and you had only to stick out your knife for it. Good bunks had been built all round, and each man had a hair

mattress and a donkey's breakfast to sleep on, and all bedding found. There was a little allowance of rum, too, and though it wasn't new, and was a bit short in strength, there are many that say that those old spirits are better for your insides.

They'd got the blue ensign flying aft, and some yacht club burgee up at the main truck, which was for ever fouling the telescope rail of the crow's nest beneath, and of course the deck hands had to live up to all that with squeegees and twiddley-brushes. They didn't carry on Cowes-fashion, to be sure ; but then it wasn't whaler-fashion ; and down below, in your engine room, you took some pride in keeping things bright and clean, and having the smell of fresh new paint always in the air. They'd put a new boiler in her during her overhaul, and rebored the cylinder, so that the piston hit more than sometimes now, and with a fair wind and a bit of watching, we could knock six-point-two out of her under steam alone.

Kemp, the boatswain, was at me the fourth day out about her steaming powers.

'Well,' I said, 'if they'd compounded her whilst they were at it, we could have squeezed twice the speed out of her for the same coal consumption. You might think she was engined by a colliery proprietor, the way she is.'

'Pray Heaven they load her well with coal.'

'Well, I'm no ascetic myself, and I pray Heaven they do no such thing. Man, the less coal they carry the oftener they'll have to put into Vardö, or Archangel, or one of those northern ports, to re-bunker. I'd have ye know, bo's'n,

that I'm a fellow that can do with a jaunt ashore now and again.'

'Where d'ye think the packet's bound for this cruise, Mac?'

'Vardø first, then across to Nova Zembyla, and push North along the coast as the ice lets us. The swells aft will go ashore when they choose, to shoot and draw maps, and us to work the ship up equal to them.'

'Would you be a hand to changing that programme, Mac, if there was pointed out to you a way you could make a competence? I've heard you say you've an old mother depending on you. It would be a fine thing to be able to set your mother up independent for all the rest of her days.'

He was looking at me queerly out of the corner of his eyes as he talked, as though to see how I took it, and so being cautious by nature (I'm Scottish myself, although you would never guess it of me) I did not implicate myself. I said: 'Ye must understand, bo's'n, that my mother is as proud and particular as the Duchess of Argyle. She's a McKenna of North Uist herself, and the man she married was the most respected minister in the Free Kirk of Scotland.'

'She need never know where the money comes from. You bet your life, Mrs. McTodd would ask no questions if only the lump sum was big enough.'

'See, here,' I said, turning on him, 'you leave my people alone, or I'll drive your nose through into your back hair.'

He got up, and made to go out of the mess-

room. But at the door he turned and faced me again. 'I suppose you're a cranky beggar always, and at the present moment I make no doubt you've a bad head on you. But in your sweeter moments, if any ever come to you, just think over what I've said. There's things that'll be of advantage to you if you take the chances that are offered ; and if you don't, well, I believe the water in the Arctic is bitter cold and unpleasant for those that chance to slip over side.'

He walked out then, and I knocked out my pipe, and went on watch. As I've mentioned, they weren't engines that asked for any particular pride or skill, and I ran them as easily and with as little thought as I should eat my dinner. So I had all the more time for going over what Kemp had said. It was little enough, to be sure, and yet it was something. If I had been on civil terms with the skipper, or with either of the mates, or even with my own chief, I should have handed it on, and let loose a warning. But with none of these was I friendly ; they were all of the regular yacht officer type, and you know what that is ; and so there was nothing for it but to chew my news in silence. But still, if there were any hanky-panky tricks on ahead, I intended to have no share in them. I may have been a wild handful in my time, but never dishonest. That's not respectable ; and, moreover, it's very unsafe.

The *Pole Star's* new owner carried a territorial title which I never caught. On board he went by the name of the Marquis. He had with him two nephews, Mr. John and Mr. Cecil, and a niece,

Miss Jane, who might have been twenty-three, and ought to have known better than to come on a trip into that wild Arctic climate. As you will guess, none of these were anything in my way, and when off watch I spent most of the time smoking in my bunk for fear they should come sucking up to me for 'yarns,' which is the disgusting way passengers and yacht owners have. The other officers liked that sort of thing; as I have said, they were regular yacht officers; but I know fine how to respect myself.

I had it flung at me that I earned the name of a sulky blackguard, but a fat lot I cared for that. I did my duty, and that's what I was paid for. If they wanted frills thrown in, they should have said so when I signed on, and offered me a higher wage.

Coal was no object to a yacht, of course, and so instead of beating north across the open, we stood over to Norway, picked up a pilot, and worked through the Lofoten Channel, away up to North Cape, and along the lid of Europe under steam alone.

In Vardø we re-bunkered. You can get best Welsh up there for almost the same figure it costs from Cardiff or Newport coal drops, because the Archangel timber boats bring it up as ballast.

It was here that my chief and the second mate left us, and it is my private opinion they were drugged. They were both of them steady chaps, and not given to more than a glass or two, but they got ashore, and lay about in the stinking fish-strewn streets insensible when we ought to have been sailing, and the Marquis he wouldn't have them

aboard again at any price. So we shipped a Norwegian mate, and a *moujik* for fireman, and one of the old firemen was shoved up to be second engineer, and there was me as chief, in the berth I ought to have had all along.

There was just one thing for which I did not like the promotion. It seemed to bring me into prominence. As chief, and a steady man—great whiskers! Think of me as steady! I was for ever being consulted by his lordship, who considered himself no small piece of a sailor. It seemed he'd made some study of heavy lubricating oils, and I must say his opinions on them were just sickening. But I knew my place. I made him consider himself George Stephenson; a very humorous situation when you remember that this Marquis had no sort of proper education worthy of the name. He was just what they call an amateur.

Miss Jane, too, must needs give me some of her attention. I mind when we were steaming past Kolguev one sunlit night, I thought the deck would be clear, and was taking part of my watch on the engine-room skylights. (I'd got that old low-pressure rattle-trap to such perfection, that she was running as sweet as a watch, which you'll admit showed high mechanical genius.) I was staring at the coast mountains, looking far enough through them I make no doubt, for they somehow reminded me of the hills above Ballindrochater, where mother lives.

Well, Miss Jane coughed, and I turned as quick as if I'd leaned over a hot steam pipe. She'd a deck chair on the fiddle, and was sitting there in

the warmth under the lee of the smoke stack. 'You see I'm standing a watch, Mr. McTodd,' says she as sweet as ninepence. 'I'm getting quite clever with the deck work now, and soon I shall be asking you to give me a course of engine-room instruction.'

I felt myself loose off into a gentle perspiration.

As, perhaps, you'll have gathered, it's few ladies I can really take pleasure in the society of. But I knew my place well enough to give her a genteel reply. 'Certainly, Miss, or anything else I can do to pleasure you. But I wouldn't recommend my engine-room just now. It's that moujik we shipped in Vardö who's not quite what ye might call in paraphrase 'up to Dick.' I was giving him an order when I came on watch just now, and he offered to strike me on the face with a red-hot fire slice.'

'But, Mr. McTodd, you should tell the captain and have him put in irons, or whatever the proper course is.'

'Oh, I broke him up quite comfortable without help, thank you, Miss, and if he comes to his senses again by the time his watch is next called, that is all he'll do. When I hit, it's like a mule kicking.'

Now I'll admit that I was a bit flustered at her speaking to me at all, and perhaps the style of conversation was not what I should have exactly chosen. But how was I to know that a mild-looking young lady like that would fly out in the way she did? She got up from her chair, and, 'Mr. McTodd,' says she, 'please understand that I

disapprove of officers who knock the crew about, and I am sure that in this my uncle thoroughly agrees with me. For the future, you will kindly keep discipline without violence. I wish you a good morning.' And away she dragged her chair aft on to the quarter-deck, and sat down with her back to me.

It was a great pity this should have happened, as it seemed to give Miss Jane a wrong impression of the kind of man I was, and when the pinch came, which it did shortly afterwards, she looked upon me at first as just as big a pirate as any of the rest of them.

I must say, then, that we pushed across to Nova Zembla, which we did pretty easily, as it was a good year for the ice, and then we started to send our gentlemen ashore to hunt.

At first they were cautious enough. They'd wait till the weather was clear, and go off in a whale-boat and never get out of sight of the crow's nest; and on board the skipper would be an old maid for fidgets till they were back again. But with three trips ashore they got more bold, and on the fourth the skipper was to go off with them.

There was a nice party of them: the Marquis, Mr. John, Mr. Cecil, and the Old Man, with four hands to row the whale-boat, and Kemp, the boat-swain, at her steering-oar. Away they went off, dodging amongst the floating floe ice, and presently made a landing. Then the boat came off again, and in reasonable time was alongside.

Kemp had his hand wrapt in his neckcloth, and carried a face all screwed up with pain. He'd got

nipped, he said, and his lordship had sent him aboard to get fixed up. The mate was to take back the boat to wait for them, and would Miss Jane go off and take a run ashore?

I was on deck and heard it all, and nothing could have been more ordinary. The mate went for his sea-boots and a muffler, and got down into the whale-boat; a message came up that Miss Jane had a headache and preferred to stay aboard; and the boat went off without her.

Presently a fog came down, cold and wet and thick as a blanket, and it was from this fog I got my first hint of what was going to happen. 'We'll have to let the shore party know where we are,' thinks I, 'if they're to find their way back again,' and so went below to turn steam on for the whistle, ready against when it might be wanted. Kemp was in command now, and I made no doubt but what Kemp would make our whistle string fast to the bridge rail, and send continuous music out over the sea.

But Kemp, it seems, had no such idea. A quartermaster lifted the engine-room skylight and called down to me to turn off steam from the whistle at once. I asked him what for. I noted that his face looked drawn and scared. He said I'd best to obey orders, and slammed down the skylight again.

Presently *clang—clang—clang* went the telegraph bell for full speed ahead, and I got her started and opened her out according to orders. As I'd had no more than stand-by steam ordered, I was forced to drive my fireman a bit whilst he

got up pressure, and was so employed when I heard a row start up on deck. Well, if there's a fight going, it's a rare thing but what Neil Angus McTodd isn't helping, or in the immediate neighbourhood. But somehow I seemed at that moment to be cooled into unaccustomed caution. Ye'll observe that a chief engineer's duty is in his engine-room and the adjacent stoke-holds and bunkers, particularly in periods of popular emotion, and with what goes forward on deck he has no official concern. So I was quite within my rights in staying where I was. But I'll own that my conscience was hiccuping about inside me very unpleasantly.

The row on deck went on, though at first it seemed confined to bawling and noise. But presently there was a shot and a scream, and, after some more shouting, a heavy splash over the side.

It was beginning to look more than ugly now, and I thought that a piece of what we call diplomacy might be used without disadvantage. So I shut off steam and stopped my engines. There was a skylight lifted, and Kemp looking down before you could say twinkle. He'd a big revolver in his fist and an ugly look in his eye, and as for a crushed hand, that had evidently been all a blind to get the mate off into the whale-boat.

'For what reasons were those engines stopped?' says he, with quite the captain's tone to him.

'Because I signed on here to drive engines fired by the Marquis's coal, and it's come to my mind the coal has changed owners.'

'Well?'

‘Well, I’m nice about my employers. It isn’t every one I choose to work for.’

‘I guess you’ll work, my buckstick, for the man that makes you work.’

‘That’s a job above your size, bo’s’n, so I give ye fair warning not to try it. I’m an evil fellow to fratch with.’

‘I’m Captain Kemp here now, and you’ll give me the title. You see this pistol?’

‘It’s big enough.’

‘And it can carry straight. Now just take your orders from me, and open her up and set her full speed ahead again, or I’ll make a vacancy for a new chief engineer.’

‘Man,’ I said persuasively, for I did not wish to anger him unnecessarily, ‘you talk very free and clever, but whilst your wit’s been working, d’ye think my diplomacy has been sitting around with its hands in its pockets? If ye shoot me, what d’ye think ye’ll lack—not only a very highly competent engineer, but a vessel to carry you.’

‘Save us from this preacher! What freak have you got in your head now?’

‘Just this. Look at my footplates here! D’ye notice they’re awash?’

‘She’s making a good sup of water. That bit of a nip in the ice yesterday must have strained her. Turn steam into your bilge pump, man.’

‘Don’t be in such a whiskers of a hurry. The leak, if you’re pleased to give it that name, is of my devising. You’ll mind you gave me a hint before we left home that something was to be done off the square. So I just amused myself by fitting her

with a new sea-cock against this emergency. Where it is I'll defy you or any other man on board to discover. I've learned that it always is best to have a stand-by like this when it comes to treaty-making. Have you a match to spare? My pipe's out.'

Kemp's face was a picture to see. He would have shot me then if he dared, and have liked the job. But the sight of that cold scummy water that was beginning to slop over the foot-plates daunted him, and so he took a pull on himself and swallowed his temper.

'Shut off your sea-cock and don't be a fool, Mac. You'll make a fortune over what is ahead of you, and I don't see why you should quarrel with me about that.'

'I'd be hearing your programme, please.'

'You shall have it packed close. I was sealing in the Pribyloff Islands last year, and heard the Russian Government had started new rookeries up here in the Kara Sea. They are strictly preserved, of course, and, indeed, it's few people who know there are any islands at all. But I and a few mates have schemed to take this old packet out there, and skim up those seals before any one is the wiser, and afterwards I guess I know a market in the Petchora River where prices will be almost as good as one could get at home.'

'Yes, but there will be questions asked.'

'There will be none. They'll be only too glad to get the sealskins. Afterwards we'll split up the roubles, sink the *Pole Star*, and scatter. For safety, consols aren't in it; and for an investment, it'll

be the best you'll ever have the chance of in all you wicked life, Mac. You spoke of your mother, and your wish to see her in easy circumstances. I guess it will be just cold-blooded robbery of your mother if you miss this chance here that's offered to you.'

Heaven help me, when I heard that man's smooth talk the greediness in me nearly got the upper hand. Here was the chance of getting mother provided for at one deal; and once that was off my mind, I knew that I could fling about the world as I chose, and have no call whatever to save any of my wages.

'Come,' said Kemp, 'get those engines started again. Every minute wasted here is good money out of your pocket as well as mine.'

'Do all the other hands agree?'

'All that are left on board. They took a bit of persuading, some of them.'

I thought of that shot and the splash, but did not put any question about that. After all, if Kemp had set himself up as captain, he must keep his own discipline, and there are many officers that say killing's no murder for a captain. But I'd just one other point to be satisfied upon. 'What about Miss Jane, aft?'

Kemp laughed. 'Well, she had her chance to go ashore to join the others, and didn't take it; and as she preferred to come along with us, I suppose we must provide her with a husband.'

'That'll be as she chooses. I'm not going to stand by and see her inconvenienced, that's all.'

'Oh, anything for a quiet life,' said Kemp,

and let down the skylight top. I gave her the steam again then, and when the old engines started their tune once more, thinks I to myself: 'Neil, man, ye're as big a pirate as the rest of them, but it's all in a good cause.'

It was only the first start-off Kemp had any trouble about. Once the *Pole Star* had been run off with, things went on as comfortable as any packet I've ever used knife and fork on. We coasted back down the Nova Zembyla shores again, and made our Easting through the Jugor Strait, and into the Kara Sea as easy as running across the Western Ocean. Ice scarcely worried us a bit; it was a wonderful clear season for ice; and you could always pick a good channel from the crow's nest. And always, of course, we saved coal when there was a breeze to drive her. Coal is scarce up in the Arctic, but as for wind, there's more than you can do with as a general thing.

As for behaviour, well, if we were a bit free in our manners, that's only what could be expected. But duty was done smartly enough, and there weren't any of those fancy games played that you read of in books when a crew has run off with a ship that belongs to somebody else.

It was easy to see, of course, that Miss Jane was the difficulty. If she had gone ashore with the Marquis and her brothers all would have been pleasant and sweet. But on board, and the ship run away with as she was, there were some that looked upon Miss Jane as no better than a rope for their necks. The matter was brought before Kemp, but Kemp took it with a laugh and a wink. 'A

husband's the thing to stop that young lady's mouth, and once we are across to the Petchora with a good cargo of skins, I'll get a Russian Pope to marry her as tight for a couple of roubles as the Archbishop of Canterbury would do for five thousand. Don't you run about and think I'd forgotten the little item of Miss Jane. You always catch Captain Kemp underwriting the whole of his risk when insurance is to be got as cheap as it is here.'

Well, there it was, and take it or leave it ; no one felt more than a passing interest in Miss Jane. Hands can't be expected to give much thought to a passenger. And besides, there was Kemp with his pistol quite ready to shoot any one who disagreed with him. There were too many of a crew, according to Kemp, and if they were thinned out a bit, there'd be all the fewer to share.

The way we came up to those seal islands and killed off their stock was ridiculously easy. There was no guard kept on the place ; the blessed Russians seemed to think that because the islands hadn't a name, and weren't on the chart, no soul could know they lay there but themselves ; and yet the rookery bade fair to equal those on the Pribyloffs or any in the Japanese sea for richness. It shows how nations differ ; if the seals had belonged to a Scotch firm they would have been guarded like so many six-pences ; but these blessed Russians have no savvy.

For sport, knocking seals over the nose with clubs is not what you call high-class, and for diversion there are cleaner operations than flinching off the blubber, and salting down greasy skins,

however valuable they may be. For scenery, too, there were none of those fine icebergs you see in books, with aurora turned on like a firework show, and all the place lit up with pleasant colours. There was grey fog around us the main part of all the time, and when that failed, we'd have a turn of snow, or disgusting sleet with gales. It was regular Arctic weather, you see, and that's always untasty when you're in it, whatever it may be to look back to. But with seal fur at the price it is to-day, the value of the skins we handled was enough to turn you crazy.

Only one person on board did not take share in the flinching, and that was Miss Jane ; and though there were one or two toughs who suggested that she might as well work for her living like the rest of us, that tune was stopped quick. As it was, she was treated civil ; as often as not getting a cap touched to her, but never meddled with ; and to all outward show she remained as if the Marquis and her brothers had been on board, and she had no more reason to fear insults than she had to dread the moon falling.

It was scary work holding the *Pole Star* in her position off those seal islands, and tempers wanted stitching. Ice began to bear down out of the north and east almost before we had begun our butchery ; gales fair shouted at us ; and the *Pole Star* got nipped now and again, and opened up some of her old soft places till she leaked like a fishing net. My whiskers ! when floe ice begins to pile itself in the Kara Sea, it can lick even Davis Straits for ugliness.

But Miss Jane, when the weather cleared at all, took her ordinary constitutional on the poop, and to look at the calm, indifferent way about her, you might have thought she was just doing the genteel in Princes Street, Edinboro'. There was no truckling about Miss Jane. She could smile at you, and talk with you, and yet keep you in your place as though you were her footman and wearing a livery. I've never seen a young lady more self-possessed, no, not even on the stage of a music hall, and I'm a man of some experience from an onlooker's point of view.

Bitterly we worked, and fiercely we clung on to our position amongst the islands. Each seal-skin was worth an old sailor's wage for a couple of years, and we did not intend to leave one behind that effort could get. There were weak-kneed ones amongst the crew who needed stiffening. There were well-built men there who cried all the day through at the cold and the hardness. But Kemp laid in at them like a fellow born to be a shipmaster, knocking them about as though he had been brought up as a Yankee mate; and presently I found myself helping Kemp, doing every bit as much as he did towards breaking up malingerers and putting spirit into the rest, till you might have thought Kemp and I were doing skipper of the *Pole Star* equally between us.

It was through this, curiously enough, that I came to my understanding with Miss Jane. There was one of the hands that I'd ordered to some work, and as he was not quick enough for my taste, I just told him he'd a face I could make look a lot

picturesquer if he didn't put more hurry into his job. Upon which he picked up a pin out of the rail, and I another, and presently there were the pair of us going it ding-dong as useful as you please. Well, there's nothing in that you'll say ; no doubt you'll have used a belaying pin yourself, and taken care to choose an iron one if the other fellow's got greenheart ; but Miss Jane, who was walking the poop, seemed to think different.

When I had given my man toko, and chucked him down the forescuttle to come-to again, she called me aft. 'Mr. McTodd,' says she, 'I have given you my opinion before about this sort of behaviour.'

'If you don't like Captain Kemp's ways, Miss,' says I, meaning to be humorous, 'you should speak to him about it.'

'Mr. McTodd, please do not quibble. You choose for the moment to masquerade as a savage like any of the rest of them, and I suppose it amuses you, or you wouldn't do it. But that does not get over the fact that you were bred to a very different station, and if you want to know my informant, it was that detestable Kemp himself. He seemed to think the fact that you were born in the Free Kirk Manse at Ballindrochater was a subject for jest, and seeing what I had done of your current behaviour, I could not contradict him.'

'Ay, Miss,' said I, as quick as you like, 'but I have not any such delicate scruples. Jest about my folk and my upbringing, did he, the beggar ? I'll handle Kemp.'

‘Then let me tell you this, Mr. McTodd. If you offer him the least opportunity, Kemp will shoot you on sight. He told me as much. And it is my idea he intends to have you out of the way.’

‘I have taken my risks before, and been none the worse for them.’

‘Yes, but before, perhaps, you have never had such a responsibility upon you as there is now. Mr. McTodd, does it not occur to you that I am the only woman on this ship, and that I’ve only you to stand between me and a harm that it makes me sick even to think about?’

‘By whiskers ! Miss, I never thought of it that way before.’

‘You see how entirely I am relying upon you. You see how you must take care of yourself, if only for my sake.’

She clung to my arm with a sudden spasm of weeping. She’d shown brave enough up to now, as I’ve said, and it surprised me to see her upset. ‘Oh, Mr. McTodd,’ she cried, ‘get me out of it at once. I’m all eaten up with terror. I can’t hold my coolness much longer, even before Kemp.’

‘You must take a brace on yourself, Miss, and manage it somehow. Out here on this cold Arctic desert of ice and water there’s no habitation but this ship. Alone, you and I cannot work her, and I’m free to tell you I’m no navigator. We want the crew, and we want Kemp, and it’s my idea they should take the *Pole Star* back for us to the Petchora, or somewhere else where there are

travelling conveniences which you'll find more to your taste.'

'Then hurry them for me. Promise you will hurry them. Send your engines along quicker, Mr. McTodd. Please do your best, for I can hold out against this strain very little longer.'

The ice fairly beat us a day or two after this, and it was a choice between trying to get through the pack or staying to be crushed. As it was, it was touch and go with us, and I must say Kemp handled her through the pack as cleverly as any Arctic skipper I ever sailed with. Many times we all looked to be beset or nipped. The whale-boats were kept provisioned, and every man had his bag packed ready. The young ice grew and thickened between the blocks of floe till there was no water left in sight, and all was slishing, grinding sludge and hummocks. But we slipped down to the coast at last, and then through the jam in Jugor Straits, and then we'd a clear course of it to the mouth of the Petchora.

It was here for the first time that Kemp began to show up real awkward. The talk about Miss Jane being provided with a husband to keep her mouth shut was done quite openly now, and presently word was passed that Kemp was going to sign on for the berth. The thing began to be plain. Kemp oiled his hair, and put on a uniform belonging to the old skipper, and began to pay his court openly.

It was clear that Miss Jane found his attentions disgusting, though I must say she spoke him fair always, having advice in that direction from me ;

but one day Kemp began to think that courting without a kiss was a dry job, and then came the fizz-up. Miss Jane called out for me in a way that sent me all tingling.

Kemp sent a shot through my hair before I got home on his cheek bone, but the revolver went flying, and Miss Jane picked it up off the deck, and stood by ready for squalls. But I wanted no interference of that sort. I'd had it from her that the beggar had been making jests about my old folk at Ballindrochater, and I just warned all the world to stand wide whilst I settled my family differences.

He could use his dukes like a professor, and if those of the men who looked on did not appreciate the fight, they were no judges of talent.

I think Miss Jane got a little beyond herself. One moment she was calling out to me to kill Kemp, to kill him, kill him ; the next it was, ' Mr. McTodd, oh, don't let him hurt you ; ' and the next she was trying to get some of the hands to step in and stop the fight. But I give Kemp credit for fairness ; he promised to tear the throat out of any man that interfered ; and we went at it smash, bang, sock, with as fair give-and-take as any man could wish to see.

I have fought for women before, but never for a lady, and I guess Kemp was in the same box, and, moreover, he wanted her badly ; and so you see we were both doing a little bit beyond our best. But he'd a soft spot in him somewhere, and I guess breed told with me. I could take a heap more punishment than he could, and I soon dis-

covered that he winced when I hit him over the heart. So I let him drive at my hard old face all he chose, and gave all my talent and attention to getting in body blows, and at last these fixed him. Down he went like a pole-axed bullock.

Some of his pals began to look ugly. 'This swine McTodd has killed the skipper,' I heard one mutter.

'If any other beggar wants his gruel,' said I, 'let him stand up here.'

There was no takers.

'Very well, then,' said I, 'I'm best man on board this packet, and till a better shows himself, I'm skipper. Take Kemp forward, and I give him full leave to have whatever there is in the medicine chest suitable for his complaint. I can't say fairer than that.'

We were well up the Petchora estuary by then, feeling our way along between mud-banks. There was tundra on either side beyond, and then other mud-banked channels—and that is about the most depressing kind of scenery this world produces. Miss Jane was crazy at the sight of dry land again, and was all for leaving the ship and making a way across country to Archangel. But I told her that that was sheer foolishness; nobody but Samoyedes can live on the tundra; and leaving the ship was no better than open suicide.

Still, we were forced to doing no less than that same thing that very night. Word reached me that the hands were sick of my behaviour. We were getting near a Russian settlement, and their throats tickled at the thought of the rope. Miss

Jane was an open accusation against their piracy ; Kemp seemed to them the only man capable of dealing with the situation ; and as for Neil Angus McTodd, they began to look upon him as no better than the hangman.

It was clear there was no time to be lost. You'll know me by this time for a man that's little nervous, and though it was a case of me against all the crew, I've a mind that if I'd been alone, I might have taken it on for the sheer delight of the scrap. But with Miss Jane depending on me it was a different matter, and I had to forego my own personal tastes.

The chance came bright and useful. They blundered the *Pole Star* on to a mud-bank, and though they got a whale-boat lowered and a kedge laid out astern, she stayed there till they'd lost the tide. There was no use in further work till the flood made again, and so the hands went below to grumble and screw up their pluck to scrag me and the lady. I stayed on deck, smoking and sneering at them till they were all gone, and then I jumped lively. There was not much in the pantry and galley, but I took what there was ; also blankets and oileys, and a coat or two ; also a small keg of rum from the lazareet. Then I got Miss Jane and the jock down into the whale-boat, which lay alongside, cast off, and in a minute we dropped down astern out of sight in the fog.

'How's that for clear?' said I. 'The tide's on the turn, and presently, when the flood makes, we shall pass the old packet again, and continue our journey up stream to this settlement, wherever it is.'

She shivered and pulled her wraps closer round her. 'I shall not go back to the *Pole Star* again. If they come up and catch us, I have still got Kemp's pistol, and I shall use it on myself.'

I laughed, and told her she might save her cartridges.

'I'd a private sea-cock of my own fixing on that vessel,' I told her, 'which they won't find without a powerful deal of searching. I opened that sea-cock before I left, and the *Petchora* was running into the stoke-hold most humorously. They'll be far too occupied in pumping it back again into place to think of chasing us.' And though I do not know of my own observation that this precisely happened, there seems every likelihood of it, because we never saw them again.

I cannot say, though, that that boat trip was very pleasant to me. We anchored on each ebb, and moved only when the flood tide carried us up stream, and in time we came to the settlement where the traders live, and found there most civil entertainment. But Miss Jane's manner changed towards me. On the *Pole Star*, after she had satisfied herself about my birth, she encouraged me to look upon myself as her equal. Out here in the boat she acted what I should term exclusive. She was stiff in her talk. She was in a perpetual hurry to be done with the voyage. And she would neither take a ration of rum herself as a guard against the climate, nor permit me to swallow one myself without making injurious remarks about my habits. And, in truth, when we did bring up at the settlement, I must say I was glad to be rid

of my responsibility. I really think Kemp would have been sorry afterwards if he had married Miss Jane.

They possessed at this settlement, of all unlikely things, a telegraph, and very soon Miss Jane, who made herself very agreeable in French with the officer commanding, got a wire through to London. The reply took two days on the road, but it seemed to please her entirely when it did land. The Marquis and Mr. John and Mr. Cecil and the others had worked home to that Russian post on the south of Nova Zembya, and got taken off by the annual Archangel trader. They were just home again to get the wire, and pleased enough they were to see it, as they had reckoned on her being dead, or worse. They had worked up, too, on some consul, or ambassador, or official like that, and as a consequence all the Government of Archangel was rustling about to pay Miss Jane compliments, and do her a service.

Well, you know how sickening Russians can be when they start doing the polite like that, and I may as well own up at once that no one seemed to have given them orders to lick my boots as well. The whole business seemed to get on my nerves, and, besides, their vodki was very much like methylated spirits ; and when a Russian, who had come down from up the river, asked me to go back with him and mend up an old steamboat he'd got there, mentioning a high rate of wage, I just closed with that man, and left without mentioning my destination.

I said no word of good-bye to Miss Jane,

and concluded she would manage to do without it. I thought at the time she was giving herself unjustifiable airs. But when, next spring, I worked my way back to Scotland again, and heard that she had made it her business to find out mother in Ballindrochater, and had been very useful to her, I thought more kindly of the young lady, and you have my full leave to tell her so if ever you meet.

I should like her to know, too, that what she did for Mrs. McTodd was quite justifiable, and was by no means charity. If it had not been for her, mother would have had a share in those seal-skins, whilst, as it was, I very much fear the Russian Government's fancy new rookery was raided uselessly. I never heard of the cargo being sold, and most probably the *Pole Star* was sunk in one of those mud creeks of the Petchora, and the hands hooked it in various directions, with the fear of the law driving them. So you see they were well paid out for their piracy, and as for myself, why, I have got a clear conscience.

CHAPTER XI

THE WIDOW AND THE CANNERY

MRS. LARSEN told me plain that she did not take to me at first on account of my looks, and I can quite understand that. I am lusty and big-built, of course, but at that time it was some months since I had trimmed my beard, and my clothes were just disreputable. I've never been what you call a dandy about my personal appearance. There was a skipper I sailed with once, called Kettle, that could look neat and smart after he had starved three weeks in an open boat ; I've seen him look that way ; and as for trimming the hair on his face—but I'll tell you about him some other time. Just now we're on with the widow Larsen.

She wasn't exactly an oil painting herself, if it comes to good looks, and I should say no man ever got his arm more than half-way round her waist at one stretch ; but for keen business instinct I don't suppose you ever met that woman's equal. Three husbands she'd had, and met with very bad luck with all of them, having buried the lot. If it had not been for the expense entailed by their illnesses and funerals, she said herself she'd have

been a millionaire, and even as it was, when I first met her she was a considerable capitalist. Why, I suppose that woman, if she could have got all her money out of her various ventures, would have stood at the head of a good £2000!

But, as it was, a good many of her investments were, so to speak, locked up, and that is the reason she had to run her Spitzbergen idea on the share plan instead of paying her hands in the usual way. However, as she pointed out, hands need not grumble at the share plan. If only they put their backs to the work, they stood to pull in four times the ordinary wage.

She told me plainly, too, how she came by her knowledge of the various trades we must use.

'It was in Chicago I met my first husband,' she said. 'We were both employed in a meat cannery. I was a girl that pasted on labels to start with, and afterwards did soldering on piece-work. He operated a machine in the anatomy department. He was a true man and a true American, was my first, Mr. McTodd. He had every intention of rising to wealth and eminence, but he took part in a presidential election during the third year of our married life under very wet weather, and died of pneumonia complicated with concussion of the brain.'

'I know what an Irish-Yankee policeman's club is,' I said, 'I can sympathise with you there.'

Her next husband was in the provision business in Hull, and her third was Captain Larsen, who used to have one of those Finner whale fishery concerns, just round the North Cape before you

get to Vardø and the White Sea. It was during the time of her happiness with Captain Larsen that she learned the various niceties connected with the Finner whale trade, and that, let me tell you, is a fishery very few English or Yanks know anything about. It is worked almost entirely by what you call Dutchmen, or Norwegians, as they name themselves at home.

When I came up with her, she was all fit out for this new spec. except that she had no engineer, and when I had agreed to take on the berth (being pretty hard pushed for the moment), she told me plain that if I would act as a sort of first mate as well, and break up any rowdies and any hands that didn't care for her orders, she'd promise I shouldn't be the loser by my condescension.

She glanced me all over with a knowing eye. 'Mr. McTodd,' she said, 'from the look of your build, and the look of your face, you should be able to keep order if it came to trouble.'

'I'm pretty useful in a scrap,' I owned, 'and if any one of your hands gives sauce to either you or myself, he'll probably think he's been struck by a meteorite. But I don't guarantee to tackle the women. I'll say up at once I'm not sweet on this idea of bringing women along.'

'Must have women on a cannery. But don't you worry about them. I'll not ask you to raise a finger against them. You leave me to tackle the ladies if they grow fractious.'

Of course I guessed beforehand that the grub would be pretty noxious; it always is on those Norwegian craft; and away up there on the North

of Europe they'll stand anything. But when we did get away to sea, and I did tackle it, it nearly paralysed me. You know how those Norwegians eat : all dead things, most of them pretty far gone, and you shave them into slices, and put them on bread that's like concrete, and bolt them down as best you are able.

You didn't think much of the grub though, once we were under weigh. The bit of a steam-boat we were on was only fifty tons, if that. She was the regular style of a launch-thing that the Norwegians use for fishing the Finner, with a big harpoon-gun on her stem head, crow's nest on the foremast, and two whale-boats half as big as herself in davits. Nothing wrong in that, you'll say, but wait a bit. She was loaded down with stores and tackle that close you couldn't get so much as another axe-handle into her below without prizing the deck off. And besides that she'd fifty-eight live, full grown men and women aboard of her as passengers and crew.

There wasn't sleeping room below for above a third of them, anyhow, and even then they were lying about on my engine-room foot-plates, and camping out, whole companies of them, in the whale-boats under their awnings. Even in smooth water we were loaded down till the covering boards were pretty nearly awash, and once we got up into a sea-way, I didn't see what was to prevent the decks being swept, and half of them being sent overboard.

But the widow seemed quite unruffled about it. 'Norwegians don't mind a bit of crowding,' she

explained. 'Keeps them warm. They learn that in the *sæter* huts, when they take the cattle to the high ground in summer. Besides, they're used to small craft like this. Put them on the *Teutonic* or the *Paris*, and they'd be as lonely as I don't know what. You're a bit new to it yet, Mr. McTodd. But I know. I married a Norwegian gentleman for my third. Reach down your arm through that skylight, and bring up the bottle out of my berth. We'll have a schnapps. You can't make fine profits without undergoing a little discomfort. If I were a really rich woman I'd be more run after than I am now. It's money you men all look for in a widow, Mr. McTodd.'

Now she'd as good as said to me several times already that she would be mine for the asking, and indeed pointed out before we sailed that we weren't going to take a parson along with us, and those who wanted the services of one must use the Vardø padre or wait till we got back again. But in the country where I come from we've grown the habit of being cautious, so I said I was strict Free Kirk, and would be married only (when the time came) by a minister of my own persuasion. You see, with a lady who's had three already, it's due to yourself not to fulfil her hopes all at once.

I will say about Mrs. Larsen though, she had pluck. Twice we had to run back for shelter under the Norwegian coast, with hands baling the engine-room to keep her from being drowned out. We lost three swept overboard as it was, and with the bitter cold and the constant wet it is a marvel to me that more of them did not go. It was a

fine certificate to their toughness that they could stand the exposure. But nothing rattled the widow. She'd fat easy words for all, and a schnapps bottle for the worst cases, and to hear her we might have been picnicing, instead of bucketing about the wild Arctic sea, in an overloaded, undersized, leaky bit of a launch.

However, at last the weather eased, and we made a dash for Spitzbergen, heaving up, I remember, on the stroke of midnight from the bay before that village in at the back of the North Cape Island, and steaming out into the sunlight over a heavy oily swell. The launch was no racer, you'll understand, but she did her steady eight-point-three. The engines were compound, and I'd constant trouble with the snuffle valve, which was so placed that I couldn't get at it for repairs. But I'd two firemen to a watch, and might have had ten if only there had been room for them to crowd in. The beggars were only too keen to get down in the warmth out of that bitter, slicing cold on deck.

The nautical instruments on board were a compass on a pole, a bashed old quadrant that might have served the *Flying Dutchman*, a new towing log, and the skipper's watch by way of chronometer. We were fit out regular Norwegian style in that way, and no mistake. But the skipper seemed quite content. He was a huge lump of a chap, by the name of Kopke, all hair and grin, and when we picked up Spitzbergen sixty miles off the point where he aimed at, he was as pleased as if he had made an accurate landfall. He set about

coasting back, and 'By whiskers!' thought I, 'it's some holy seamanship I've come across this time, and no mistake.'

We steamed into the fjord at last, and brought up, and mighty glad our poor packed beggars must have been to stretch their legs ashore. We found the four log houses the widow had told us about, also the factory, all correct, and though they had been gutted of everything useful, and were pretty rotten and full of draughts, the shelter was the main thing, and patching could be done afterwards.

The widow Larsen was here, there, and everywhere, and she was about as capable a woman as you'd want to see. There was coal to be got from a seam that out-cropped in a cliff along the beach; there was cod to be caught on long-lines off the coast; there was carpentering, and coopering, and blacksmithing to be done; and by custom none of these are the work of women. But Mrs. Larsen thought otherwise.

The steamer made no stay at her anchorage. She just unloaded herself of stores and petticoat, and put to sea again at once to get hold of the fishery. All the men sailed in her, excepting only Mr. Neil Angus McTodd, whom the widow kept ashore.

Now I am not one of those who think a man should do all the work, and his wife (if he has one) should stay at home, and dress in bonnets that often cost as much as ten shillings, and have a girl to do the house duties. I'm a believer in fair shares. But the way Mrs. Larsen drove those

female hands of hers in Spitzbergen struck me as being a bit too brown.

She'd a nice sense, though, of her own dignity, and also of mine. A room was boarded off first thing, and marked 'Mrs. Larsen,' and there was another room made and labelled 'Mr. McTodd.' She and I ate together apart from the rest, with a hand to wait on us, and if any of the women gave more than half a smile my way, that poor wretch was packed off at once upon the hardest jobs.

The widow was quite open with me about her ambitions for the place. 'I see my way to being as good as Queen of Spitzbergen,' she said to me one day as we were working together in the forge. 'We shall be self-supporting here. There's stone for building, there's coal, there's deer and fish in all abundance for food. For profit we shall have the Finner whales. Oil's at a good price, bone's at any figure you like to name, and whale-beef, if it's properly canned and cooked, and got up with a nice attractive label, is as good as canned Chicago bull-meat any day.'

'Doesn't Denmark or Norway, or somebody, own these islands? You'll have a gunboat coming round to collect rates and rent if you get to look too prosperous.'

'If I had a natural protector,' says she, looking at me with a warm eye, 'I should have little fear of gunboats.'

But I wasn't taking any. I said that I'd scrap with the police or my friends at any place and on any provocation, but that I didn't feel qualified just then to act as Admiral of Spitzbergen. You

will think it very humorous of me to show modest like that, but it's a plain fact that the widow when she got tender gave me a sort of sinking feeling that I had never experienced before.

Full of schemes that woman was, and full of resourcefulness. It takes a Napoleon of the canning business, you'll say, to think of substituting whale-beef for cow-meat, but that was only one of her smallest plans. I cannot state, though, that these projects for the future altogether entertained me. What I was chiefly wrapped up in was the smallness of our present supplies. Mrs. Larsen had a theory that ingenuity and fish hooks would supply us with food, coal was to be had for the digging, and that there you were, and that all the rest was frills and luxury.

But there are other things you need in that bitter Arctic climate, and, as an instance, take clothing and drugs. All hands had come aboard in the clothing they stood in, expecting, of course, to find a slop-chest for renewals, as by Board of Trade ordained. But the Norwegians do not worry about Board of Trade, and slop-chest there was none. 'Get skins,' said the widow, cheerfully, when she was touched on this point; 'there are bears, and Arctic foxes, and deer in all abundance in Spitzbergen. We'll make new clothes of skin and fur.' But as we'd only one old rusted gas-pipe muzzle-loading gun, the hunting was not what you might call very enormous.

Drugs were represented by a half-emptied medicine chest, which had been bought as a cast-off from some old wind-jammer, and we weren't

very long on the islands before there was a call for it. The poorness of the grub and the hardness of the weather agreed but badly with some of the women, and they got all bent up with colic. Well, colic it seemed was a complaint that others could have, or else colic mixture had something pleasant about it as a beverage. The pamphlet in the medicine chest, which is put there to be a guide to doctors, said that bottle No. 7 was colic mixture, to be diluted eight times with water; and No. 7 bottle was empty. The former owners of that medicine chest had gone strong on bottle No. 7. But that did not fix the widow Larsen. She tipped bottle 5 into bottle 2, and shook them up, and served the mixture round to those that ailed. She said, with a pleasant smile, that she was a mathematician as well as a doctor, and I must say, from the appearance of the patients, the drug got as good a grip on their insides as if each had taken half a box of high-class pills. She was really a wonderful woman in her way, that widow Larsen.

Of course, the great idea of coming up to Spitzbergen at all was to find an almost untouched fishing-ground. According to Mrs. Larsen, the Finner whales were so plentiful in those seas that they had scarce room to swim about for fear of jostling their neighbours. I mind that the third time she said that, and I understood she meant it humorously, I was fit to crack myself with laughter. Oh, but she was a very comical woman at times.

Indeed, if it had not been for her wit I do not think we should have pulled through for so long as a month. When twice Kopke had brought in the

little steamboat for coal, but without towing home a whale, there was a regular squall from the women to cut the whole thing and sail back before it was too late. Kopke reported the ice outside our fjord mouth as something cruel. He had spent the larger part of his time groping through fog banks and trying to avoid getting nipped. That wild, woolly beard of his had frozen once to the edge of the crow's nest, and it pained his dignity. As for whales, they had not so much as sighted the grease of one. They had seen nothing but fog and ice. Kopke said he believed it was too cold and lonely for whales round Spitzbergen.

But the widow turned off his gloomy report with fat smiles and a jest, and, 'pon my whiskers, they served her as well as sour, hard swearing would have done a man. Kopke and his hands had come in sullen, and starved, and half-mutinuous; their one idea was to steam off back to Norway; and twice she sent them to sea again as full of hope for her new Spitzbergen fishery as they had been when we first came out. She did a bit of the turtle-dove business, too, with Kopke to make all sure, and Kopke grinned out from the back of his hair as pleased as you'd want to see.

As was only natural, I had to get up a scrap with him and give him a dressing down, because, as I've told you, she had given me an 'option,' though I had by no means made up my mind to occupy the berth. My word, and didn't Mrs. Larsen appreciate the compliment, too, when she saw me slugging Kopke. I can tell you, that if you think that because a woman has buried her

three already, she's lost her sense of what is polite and due, you are clean mistaken. She enjoys a small attention like this as much as the smartest barmaid that ever bought scent.

I think I bucked up myself a bit more, too, after that time she did the civil to Kopke. I took the old gas-pipe gun, loaded her strong and heavy with slugs, and went up over the mountains at the back. I thought it might run to cloud-berries, amongst other things, but didn't find any. Dwarf Arctic willow and some mosses made up almost the whole of the vegetation, and the swamps and the mosquitoes were something beastly. But when I'd been at it three days, and was pretty nearly starved and frozen, I contrived to land my charge of slugs into a fine, fat reindeer cow, and I tell you there wasn't a more pleased man inside the Arctic Circle.

I had to camp and eat awhile to get back my strength, and as I had to trail the beast home on a sort of amateur sledge of willow shoots, going was slow, and I had to wolf a good deal of meat on the way. But I ask you to imagine the smiles the widow let out of her when at last I got my load down to the huts at the fjord head.

There was a patch of scurvy grass I found, too, on the high ground that came in very handy, for several of the women hands were beginning to find their teeth loose and their gums out of repair, and if the poor, white-cheeked lasses had not had that grass to add to their soup, we should have begun to score up funerals. But work's a grand thing. Give your hands plenty to do and they've less time

for ailments, and Mrs. Larsen acted up to this finely. Everything was made ready for realising on the whales when the steamer began to tow them in, and the widow showed herself an expert in every branch of the business, from cutting up sheet tin with the shears to sharpening blubber spades. Indeed, to see that woman use a soldering-iron at can-making was a fair poem.

Still, you could see she was anxious. I caught her one day sitting on the chine of a cask staring dreamily at a packet of our can-labels. She saw me looking at her, and blushed and sighed. 'Mr. McTodd,' she said, 'I can't help being sentimental over it. Look at that picture of a cow. Isn't it bonny? Isn't it lifelike? I wonder, shall we ever get this line of ours on the market?'

'That seems to depend upon Kopke at present,' I told her. 'If he won't bring in whales, I don't see how we are to give England the Larsen brand of prime Chicago beef.'

'He says he can't find them.'

'I've heard other incompetents say that. But at the same time, I've seen a better man in the next ship get fast to fish after fish.'

'Captain Kopke seems the best I've got.'

'Then you'd better marry him, if that's your taste.'

'Now you're jealous.'

'Go on and marry Kopke if you want him.'

She'd have pawed me if I'd let her, but I kept away. I'm not the sort of man that let's himself become a woman's toy. She'd asked me to call her Emmeline that morning. She'd been given

another name in baptism, she said, but preferred Emmeline, as being more graceful. But I Mrs. Larsened her every third word now. There's nothing like preserving the respect that's due to yourself on these occasions. 'When you marry Kopke,' I said, 'he'll supply you with door-mats merely for the cutting. I never saw such a head as that man's got for growing hair.'

'Neil, you're cruel to me.'

'I'm beginning to think I've been brought up here on false pretences. From Vardö I wrote home to my mother in Ballindrochater that presently I should be able to send her a fine remittance, and would be able to keep it up regularly. It grieves me very much, Mrs. Larsen, to disappoint mother.'

'Oh, your mother! You're always thinking first of her.'

'It is a fact, I do. And I'll repeat to you what I've said before: If I marry, mother comes to live in the house with me——' with which I left her to chew on what she'd been told.

But that widow meant business, there's no mistake about that. Before three hours were over she was asking all about Ballindrochater and the manse where we lived before the poor old man died, and what were mother's circumstances now, and I answered her short enough. But she took no offence. 'Neil,' she said, 'if you married and settled down without having your mother to come to live with you, I think, after all you've told me, you'd be acting very wrongly. Besides, you never mentioned before that she could knit.'

‘Well, after that, of course, I could do no less than make it up, and the courting, if you like to give it that name, went on nice and steadily. You can’t expect a lady who’s been through the same affair so many times already to put many new touches into it, and for myself I was very well content. I’m always very nervous when it gets near matrimony.

But the coming back of Kopke with the steamboat put a stop to all attempts of tenderness of this description. Kopke was all bristling out with scare, and it appeared he’d had hard work to bring his crew back to Spitzbergen at all. They were sick of the Arctic, sick of the fog, the cold, the ice, the bitter gales, and the desert seas. They had not seen so much as one Finner whale, and they wanted to get back to Norway again and let the land party at the canning factory rip.

It was only because Kopke promised them to give up the whole scheme once he had taken off Mrs. Larsen and the women hands, that they let him bring the steamboat into our fjord in Spitzbergen at all.

Well, you’ll say here was a pretty state of things. Clean mutiny of all hands, and nothing for it but to give in. But wait a bit. The whole crew of them came ashore savage, and half-frozen, and half-starved, and dirty enough to have chipped with a scaling hammer. It was plain to see what was coming, and so I tipped the wink to the widow and went off in one of the boats.

Some of them were for stopping me; they wanted to know what my game was. I replied

that I could have cried at the way she steamed in ; that they must have been tying my poor engine up in knots ; and that I wanted to see for myself what tailor's game they really had been playing with the machinery. After which there was a good deal of hard language thrown about (for even Dutchmen have their feelings), but I was permitted to go off.

I can tell you I wasted no time then. Once on board I got below and blew her down to nothing. The muck and rust and waste of that engine-room were enough to make you want to murder the man who had no more poetry in him than to let fine-spirited machines like those get into such a disgusting state. But I'd no time to waste on sentiment then. I set to work on the main steam and disconnected the throttle, taking it clean out and burning my fingers pretty badly in the process, for she was fine and hot still. Then I disposed of the valve overboard, and went back to shore rejoicing.

They'd not indulged in a lengthy meeting. They'd given out word that the steamboat was off back for Norway as soon as she was rebunkered, and that any one who did not choose to chip in with this arrangement would be left behind. It was quite useless for the widow to point out all the cans that had been made, and that everything was ready for making the new brand of prime Chicago once the whales were brought in. They said there were no whales, and marched off with baskets to where the coal out-cropped in the cliffs above the narrow beach. My whiskers ! but they were a filthy crew.

The widow saw me come ashore, and ran up and clutched my arm. 'Oh, Neil,' she said, 'they've beaten me and upset this cannery business for good and always unless you can save it. What have you done on the steamer?'

'Fixed Kopke and those swine anyway. It's all right: they will stay here till they rot as far as that steamboat's concerned, unless I choose to give the word. Thank the Lord she carries no duplicate parts, and they know it. Now, Emmeline, you and I will go back to the huts and have a bit of dinner. It will be as well for them to find us unconcerned when they see they are cornered.'

She was always very tender and submissive when I gave her the Christian name. So it happened, then, that the widow and I were seated quite at our ease when Kopke and his woolly scarecrows came to us, and she was telling a humorous tale, and I was laughing at the points where I saw she meant the wit to come in.

I told Kopke to go and get his hair cut when he interrupted, and the widow tried to go on with her yarn. But they were not to be put off like that. They were very angry, and not a little scared to boot. Two or three of them, I noticed, had hitched their sheath knives round to the front, so as to be ready for business if required.

'Look here, Mr. McTodd,' said Kopke. 'The hands won't stand it. They are very mad. They say if those engines are not made fit again they will take you out from here and rig a spar and hang you.'

'Now which of the hands,' says I, 'made that

pleasant offer? Kindly point them out, and then come again after Mrs. Larsen and I have finished our bit of dinner, and introduce them formally.'

'You can't fight the whole crew?'

'I'm pretty certain I could, and I don't mind trying for the sheer enjoyment of the thing; but I don't see how fighting would advantage you. If I keep my end up, I'll still be boss. But if one of your swine slips a knife into me, that doesn't mend your case. Your engines are locked; the throttle's gone; and there's not a man in your whole blooming outfit who can replace it. I'm the only trained and expert engineer in Spitzbergen, and, by whiskers! you've got to know it, and climb down and lick my boots.'

Kopke translated, and they began to jabber in their own language. I lit a pipe and sat back, and put my thumbs in my waistcoat armholes. I talked politely with Mrs. Larsen about the enormous profits to be derived from the canning trade if properly run, and she went into artistic raptures over the labels she had provided to paste on the cans. She said that no householder with any eye for beauty could fail to buy canned beef with such a perfect label. We might have been sitting on good horsehair chairs in a boarding-house parlour, to judge from the refined and elevating tone we gave our conversation.

It had its effect. The fellows gradually cooled and broke off from their wrangle, and started to listen. The easiness of our talk, as we say in paraphrase, fairly flummoxed them. When they came to me later it was all high class, and most

genteel. There wasn't so much as half a swear to the paragraph. Kopke actually coughed and said 'please.'

'Well, my man, anything I can do for you?'

'We'd like to hear your views.'

'On what?'

'On getting away from here.'

'Oh, we shall do that when we've a cargo of bone, oil, and canned beef ready, and it's time to fetch a vessel to carry those goods to the markets.'

'But our steamboat?'

'She will get back to work so soon as Mr. Kopke and five other men see fit to return to duty.'

'Six is not all of her crew.'

'Six is all that are going on this next cruise, and if you want to know who is going to be skipper, its a Scots gentleman who's speaking to you now. That's the offer, you beggars, and you will blame' well have to take it. I'm the only man in Spitzbergen who can get that craft under steam again, and you know it. The rest of you can stay here and catch cod, and go out in turns after deer with the family gas-pipe.'

It says a good deal for the cowed state they had arrived at that they did not attempt to dispute this; perhaps they thought that once aboard and the engines linked up again they could scrag me at their leisure; but anyway they came to an agreement with a little more talk, and we got on board in half an hour's time, taking with us both the boats.

I drove the whole crew of them below merely

with another handful of hard words, and padlocked the companion. Ye'll observe, I said I'd thrown the valve of the throttle overboard, and that was quite correct; but I'd omitted to mention that I'd made fast a line to it and a lump of wood which would act as a buoy well out of sight under water. So I was not long in weighing this, and getting it nitted into place. Then I got a good head of steam in her, hove up and opened her out, and then I called Kopke on deck to steer for me.

Kopke swore in sheer surprise. He knew nothing, of course, of the valve being at the end of that line. 'Man,' he cried, 'have you mended her already? Why, with the small appliances there are here, it should have been a week's job!'

'I'm a witch,' said I, meaning to be humorous. 'I learned magic from the Esquimaux *ankoots* in Greenland.' But Kopke took me serious, and told the others, and it's very little trouble I had with any of them after that. They thought I could put spells on them like a Laplander does, and make them wither if they gave me annoyance, and as a consequence, willing wasn't the word for their manners. It must be a great drawback to a nation like the Norwegians having so small a sense of humour.

But it's little enough attention I gave to the likes and dislikes of that crew. It was Finner whales I wanted, and the future of that canning business in Spitzbergen depended on my instinct and eyesight. I told off two hands to fire and drive the engines, watch and watch, and, for my-

self, I put on all the clothes I could find and took up residence in the crow's nest, and presently I was conning her in and out amongst the cold white fog banks, and amongst the drifting floe ice, like any old blue-nosed ice-master who had spent a lifetime in the Arctic.

Once they had found their boss, I must say that Norwegian crew showed willing. They were as good third-rate machines as I have met anywhere. But they had no notion of offering you *new* ideas. Even Kopke dropped into the berth of mate with obvious relief. Of course command was new to me, and, as you know, I've been a pretty drunken kind of reprobate in my time. But with all the responsibility on my shoulders, I might have been Beresford by the natural way I took it. Moreover, I'm free to confess, there was not such a thing as a drop of spirits on board.

But whales! you might seemingly as well have searched for baboons! Fog, ice, and bitter sea were our constant neighbours; seals we saw afloat, and walrus; but whales! we never so much as rose the spout of one. I stuck there shivering in that reeling crow's nest, and stared out over the misty sea till my eyes grew as red as cherries. My whole carcass ached. My breath came sour to me for want of sleep. But never once did I sight a fish. And underneath me, the ill-tended engines coughed and champed, and the bit of a boat heaved laboriously over the chilly swells. Oh, but it's dreary, heart-breaking work this whale-fishing when it's unsuccessful.

East we steamed and north we steamed, wherever

the ice would let us, now having to run at full speed and firing her like mad to avoid a nip, and then loafing along with just steerage-way; and Kopke with his rule-of-thumb seamanship and putty-mended instruments pretended to keep some sort of a check on the course. But Kopke's navigation was, as I've hinted before, of the there-or-thereabouts type, and excepting that he knew we were in the Northern Hemisphere, I've a notion that at times he'd very little further idea of our real position.

At any rate when at last we did find and kill our fish—a fine, fat bull it was, too—Kopke made a very poor return voyage of it. We'd a hard job of it to get the whale in tow. There was a heavy sea running, and it was a bitter, dangerous job getting the tail flukes cut adrift. But we stuck to it, got a bowline passed round the shank of the tail and a towing hawser made fast.

I waited and worked till all was done. I saw the little boat steam on the towing hawser, and the bull Finner come along astern, tail first, popping about over the heavy swells like some great stripped black balloon, with oil fanning out from its end, and then I'd just strength left to stagger off below. It seemed to me years since last I had closed an eye in sleep. My whiskers! but I'd have given something then for just one bottle of good, new whisky.

Kopke had the deck, and he held on with a wooden confidence. His navigation told him Spitzbergen was somewhere to the westward, and he steered in that direction till he got half way

across to Eastern Greenland. Then he turned round, and bore up for it again without being a bit ruffled. Sixty miles more or less was nothing in Kopke's calculations.

Meanwhile, of course, the tow was heavy and the pace was slow. The Finner bull got more and more gamey every day. Thinks I to myself, "People may say the Larsen brand of beef is tough, but they won't be able to complain that it lacks flavour." And when at last we did bring up with Spitzbergen, and blunder along till we closed up with the mouth of our fjord, I was half surprised the smell hadn't brought some of them up on to the high land to wave a welcome.

But no one stirred. The place seemed dead, except for mewing sea-fowl, and here and there a seal. And when we had steamed up to the head of the fjord and come to an anchor, the wretched huts and the tumble-down factory seemed deserted also. I took the whistle string and made it fast to the bridge-rail, and the ice on the high rock walls of the fjord screamed back to its squeal. It was then that Mrs. Larsen came outside and lifted a hand to us.

You may be sure it was not long before we had a boat slopped down into the water, and were away ashore.

The widow just fell on me. It's seldom I've met any one so pleased to see me a second time. 'Oh, Neil,' she said, 'I've just starved for you. I've been imagining all sorts of things. I thought you'd never come back. I have been by myself for three weeks. The day after you went, a

Dundee sealer steamed in, and when the captain came ashore the hands gave him the most pitiful tale you ever heard. It was lies every word of it. They made me out to be the most dreadful kind of criminal.'

'The swine. But no Dundee skipper would believe them against you?'

'He did not at first. He said he held no passenger certificate, and when they clamoured at him, he winked at me most pleasantly and politely, and said he couldn't dream of taking away any of them at less than a pound a head, knowing quite well the wretches hadn't a coin amongst them. He was most interested in the prospects of the cannery, and said he knew of few ladies who would have had the enterprise to found such a venture; in fact he was as nice a gentleman as I ever met till I mentioned your name. Then all was different.'

'Who was this skipper?'

'Black, his name was. Oh, Neil, I defended you like a true woman. I contradicted everything he said. But it was no use. He would hear no good of you. And he began to make injurious remarks to me about being your associate.'

I rubbed my hands in congratulation. 'I've sailed with Black more than once, and always did my best to make things unpleasant for him, but it's a great compliment to hear that he remembers my little efforts for so long a time as this. It's a very humorous circumstance.'

Mrs. Larsen drew away from me. 'I don't think it is a matter to be proud of. He's wrecked

the cannery business for us out of sheer spite. He took away all the hands with him.'

I shook with laughter. 'Very humorous. Oh, very humorous indeed. They'd no money, and yet he gave them all a free passage. The idea of Black giving a free passage to any one is just comical. Why, by nature he's the meanest man in Dundee: I've told him so frequently. Where's the laugh come in now, Emmeline? If ever I meet Black again I'll taunt him with those free passages till he'll be fit to crack with mortification.'

'You are very unfeeling. Look at that beautiful whale you have brought in. How can we handle it now with our small force?'

'Whiskers take the whale! Think of Black. I was only in subordinate positions when I sailed with him, and had only small opportunities of giving annoyance. I never flattered myself that he would remember when once he'd seen my back. But here he so loses his head with anger at the mere mention of my name, that he goes and gives free passages. Oh, I ask you to consider Black!'

It was unfortunate, you'll say, but Mrs. Larsen cooled towards me from then onwards. We could do no further service in Spitzbergen; the cannery idea must be abandoned at any rate for the present, and there was nothing for it but to rebunker and get away back to Norway as quick as we could steam.

There was talk about returning with fresh hands another season, but nothing definite was settled. Indeed you might say that we drew apart.

I know that many will blame me. I had been

offered a tender, loving heart, and I allowed my option to run out. And presently she started her old tactics again of giving soft looks to Kopke.

Well, I was beginning to have had enough of it. I didn't pleasure her by fighting Kopke again, though I could see he expected it. I just patted him on his woolly head, and wiped down his whiskers with a handful of oily cotton waste, and told him to wade in and win.

She wouldn't speak to me after that, but I did not care. I was full to the chin with thinking of Black, and once we steamed into Hammerfest harbour, my one object was to get a cast across to Dundee, where I could tell the joke.

It's often I've thought of Mrs. Larsen since, but where she is, or what she is, I do not know. You see, I am an eldest son, and mother has oftentimes told me it is my duty to marry. I might have done worse than Emmeline. She'd a fine steady way with her.

CHAPTER XII

THE MAMMOTH'S TEETH

I HAD examined the piece of skin, with its long, red, shaggy hair, and the yellow wool undergrowth, and the two black bristles, for some time, without being able to form a guess at where it had come from, and finally handed it back with the comment that it smelt a bit ancient.

The little man who had introduced himself to me as Professor Paley laughed nervously. 'Yes,' he said, 'it's ancient. I'll admit it's ancient. What should you say to that specimen being a matter of ten thousand years old, Mr. McTodd?'

'I should say it was a very humorous observation of yours, sir.' I wasn't going to say it was a lie, because he obviously expected that. 'Oh, very humorous,' I said, and went off into a crack of laughter.

He stared at me and seemed a bit upset at this, but presently he frowned, and 'Mr. McTodd,' he said, 'I'm not a person that jokes. I wanted to see if you could put a name to that specimen. As you cannot, I am free to tell you it is part of the hide and covering of a mammoth. I

suppose you will never have heard of such a creature?'

'Now there you are wrong, sir, and if you had said it was a bit of a mammoth's jacket at first, it would have saved time. Nothing uncommon in bits of mammoth. The fishermen in the Lena and those North Siberian rivers find mammoths in the frozen mud-banks when the water lays them bare, and two or three have been dug out solid and sent to St. Petersburg. But the Lena fishermen don't worry about mammoth meat and hide as a general thing; they take the ivory, and that satisfies them. There are regular merchants who have vessels and gangs of men digging and dredging for ivory in the North Siberian Islands.'

'Yes, yes, I know all this. I was coming to that.'

'Well, let me make you a suggestion, sir. The fellows that have got that mammoth ivory business in their hands up there in the New Siberian Islands are a pretty tough crowd, and they don't intend to have any competition. Some men in Vardö thought they'd like to have a share, and fitted out a ship. They waited for that ship a long time in Vardö, but she never came back, nor did most of the crew. In fact only three of her people ever showed up again, and they'd struggled back across the tundra with the help of the Samoyedes. They weren't ornamental to look at. The New Siberian Island chaps had cut off their noses and their ears, just as a hint not to call again or send their friends.'

‘Tut, tut,’ said Mr. Paley, ‘I see no purpose in telling me of these unpleasant brutalities.’

‘Why, my object is this. You don’t look to me like a fighting man, and I thought you’d better know beforehand what there is to expect. For myself, a scrap amuses me fine, and if one of those New Siberian Russians can manage to chew off my nose he’s welcome to it. But if it comes to ears, why you——’

‘Mr. McTodd, will you let me tell you my scheme? The New Siberian Islands are a fancy of your own. I never mentioned them.’

‘But that’s where the mammoths are.’

‘I don’t deny it. My specimen of hide and hair, however, came from West Greenland.’

‘No mammoth ivory has been found there, and you can take that from me for gospel. Mr. Paley, I’m a man that knows Davis Straits as well as I know West George Street, Glasgow.’

He snapped his fingers with more than a pinch of impatience. He’d a good deal of the school-master about him at times, and preferred to do most of the talking, and all the contradicting. ‘Tut, tut. I know quite well no Greenland mammoth has been discovered before. If it had been classified, I should not be here talking to you.’ And then he set out to talk and lecture, and presently, before he quite knew it, was telling me of his ambitions.

He was demonstrator in Comparative Anatomy at his University, he said, and was wishful to do some original work. This piece of skin had been brought home in an Esquimaux ankoot’s conjuring

sack by a whaling skipper. Many had handled it. He alone named it for what it was. If the skin came from West Greenland, the rest of the mammoth must be there, and other mammoth remains which could be found for the looking. Possibly the beast was of a variety not yet known to science. Anyway the discovery would bring him enormous credit in his own particular line, and he was prepared to put all his savings and all the money he could raise into the venture. 'I come to you, Mr. McTodd,' he said, 'to be my companion. I know you are not scientific. I know you have not been altogether—er—fortunate. But as for West Greenland Esquimaux—well, what shall I say?'

'I'll own up at once that I've lived with them. I know many consider it a shame for a white man (and especially a God-fearing Scot), to reside with natives of any complexion, but I can only say I've known worse landlords.'

'Quite so. And I believe also it would be no great favour to ask you to resign your present appointment?'

'As you seem to know a good deal, I don't mind admitting that I've been a bit under the weather lately, and was forced into the stoke-hold last trip through sheer necessity. But you can't disguise a good engineer even as a fireman. The old chief spotted me quick, and offered me the donkey-man's berth next voyage if I'd come. I'm quite qualified. For that matter, I'm as fully qualified as the chief is, though indeed, thanks to the beastly Board of Trade, I haven't got a ticket just at present.'

‘Tut, said the little man, with a snap of the fingers, ‘I’ll have the rest of your family history at some other time, Mr. McTodd, when we have more leisure. But at present the question is, are you coming with me as my assistant?’

‘What are the terms?’

‘You will have all your expenses paid, but I cannot afford to offer remuneration.’

I gave him a sour look. ‘It seems to me you’ve been wasting my time. Man, d’ye think I want to go to the Arctic again just for my bare health?’

‘You will be making an effort for science, and there will be a certain amount of kudos.’

‘Science be beggared,’ said I, and picked up my cap. ‘And as for the kudos, you can stick that down your own neck. I’m a man with an old mother to support, and must earn a weekly wage.’

‘Well,’ says the small chap, ‘wait a bit, Mr. McTodd, because I’m bound to have you, and we must come to terms somehow. We may make commercial results out of this trip as well as scientific. Has that struck you? Now, financial gain is a thing that appeals to me very little, perhaps because I understand so little about it. But it is possible that if I offered you the commercial benefit of any discoveries we make, that that might tempt you to join me?’

‘No, I would not. I’ve gone on share terms before, and it has always meant that the other party has got my skill and labour for nothing. I give ye good afternoon, Mr. Paley.’

'Just let me ask you for one more minute. You are a man of business instincts and ability; I can see that.'

'It's not for me to deny it,' said I, thinking the better of him for seeing at once what so many other people had failed to notice in me.

'I envy you your talent. May I beg you for a little instruction? You understand the Arctic; if there is any one who could put this expedition of mine in the way of commercial success, you are the man; and if you will give me a few hints, I shall be vastly indebted to you. You must let me ring the bell. I think you'll not refuse to take some refreshment with me.'

Now, it was not till afterwards that I found out the extent of this Paley's craftiness. He got me to take a glass with him, and just hung on my words when he had started me to talk of the Arctic. You know how it is when once you've been North; you come home from the bitter hardships of it, swearing you'll never go near them again, and at once there's something in the blood of you that starts to clamour for one more taste of the ice, and the fish-smell, and the fog, and the reek of the blubber cooking-lamps. Moreover, one glass leads to another, for it is my extravagance to stand as much as I am given, provided the money for it is in my pocket.

I've a mind, too, that when the evening was getting on, I started up a hymn, and he praised my singing. It is a flattery I never can resist when a man admits that if I had only chosen, I could have made a fortune as a comic in the halls.

And after that, I've a notion he must have had it his own way. If you come to think of it, too, what a truly magnificent head this Paley must have had to have seen me under the weather. As I once said to the Liverpool stipendiary, a head's a great gift, and not a matter of education.

It will be clear, then, to every one, how I found myself on a whaling barque with steam auxiliary, rated as doctor's assistant (as she carried no passenger certificate), and well away to sea. Paley was there, too, in great form; but he had the sense not to crow too loud over what he'd done, and so I'd no reasonable opportunity of beating him into a jelly. Instead, I must say he behaved very reasonable. He treated me as quite the gentleman, and introduced me aft as a man of science who had insisted on joining his expedition. Indeed, from the first the cabin steward called me 'sir,' and the hands forward, and even the harpooners, were quite respectful.

Davis Straits was our destination, and there was no help for it. Paley had as good as Shanghaied me.

Of course, being there's one thing, and talking about it is another. I know there are many men in boarding-houses that hold that if you find yourself on a vessel at sea against your precise will, you should start in at once to make that ship too hot for any one; and, indeed, in my own quiet way, I've played that game to some considerable tune.

But this was somehow different; there was no work to be done on board here; I was just a

passenger, and could lie and smoke in my bunk, watch and watch, if it suited my whim; and, besides, the chief engineer on board was openly grateful for a few bits of advice I chucked down to him about the action of heavy lubricants at low temperatures. It is very pleasing professionally to be looked up to in this way. But, for all that, I did not intend to let Paley have too sweet a time when we got ashore together. You don't Shanghai me for nothing!

Paley was no fool though. I believe his original notion was to be set down at one of the Danish settlements in South-west Greenland, and to make that his base; but I suppose it began to strike him that Mr. Neil Angus M'Todd might be an awkward handful to manage in a settlement, and, indeed, might e'en take the next ship for home if that way inclined. So the little chap does away with this possibility very completely. The whaler worked away up through Davis Straits, and there was no word about going ashore. I enjoyed my comforts and asked no questions; Paley smoked cigarettes and looked through a telescope when the fogs let him; and at last the old barque put her nose inshore just north of Cape Smith, and a whale-boat was lowered into the water.

'You and I go ashore here, Mr. McTodd,' says the little man. 'It was from near Cape Smith that the piece of mammoth skin was brought.'

'Well,' thinks I, 'we might be set down in a worse place.' For I knew a tribe of Esquimaux

who made their winter quarters here, and had, in fact, stayed with them. Amatikita was the name of their chief. And I knew that I should be welcome, with any friends I cared to bring. But I mentioned nothing of this. It was no idea of mine to make things too bright at first for Paley. So I just asked him humorously whether he intended to stay at a temperance hotel when he got ashore, or whether a boarding-house would do for him. If you knew the aching barrenness of the ice and the bare stone cliffs of Cape Smith, you'd appreciate the humour of this as well as I did.

But there was no getting a rise from Paley. He waited till we were in the whale-boat and under way for where the surf rattled on a strip of beach, and then says he: 'I'm content to be guided by you, Mr. McTodd. I heard rumour that you had friends near about Cape Smith glacier before ever I approached you at all about the expedition.'

'You never mentioned it before.'

He winked a sharp eye at me. 'It seems I can be what you Scots call cannie, at times. I heard you were not likely to undervalue yourself, Mr. McTodd, and it was not for me to step in and unduly appreciate your price and importance. You see I am a poor man as regards money, and have to use my wit as a substitute. But it strikes me at times that I am rich in wit.'

'You are very rich in conceit,' I said, and was going on to add other remarks which you might term unpleasant. But at that moment an inter-

ruption occurred that might very well have been a final one. The Cape Smith glacier calved. You know the glacier ice there is constantly moving down towards the sea, though the rate, of course, is remarkably slow, but by degrees, as it pushes out from the shore, the water lifts it, till at last the end slice is snapped off, and goes splashing, and turning, and kicking up a bonny commotion.

This particular berg, when it settled down to something like rest, and we could get some sort of a view of it, was about a quarter of a mile long, and stood a good 300 feet above water level. That means it was seven times as deep below the surface, and you can guess that when a piece of ice that size takes to playing antics, it is no neighbourhood for a small whale-boat.

A mile further out at sea, there was the barque we had left, tossing about like an orange in a gutter, and as for our whale-boat that was not half a mile from this walloping, aching, frisking mountain, I ask you to conceive her motions and tossing helplessness. I was at the steering oar myself, and just let it swing in the grummet, and crouched down on the floorboards, and gripped a thwart to prevent being flipped overboard. The other men did the same, hanging there dizzily.

But, by whiskers! this Paley presently gave me a shock. He clambered back on to a thwart, clinging there cockstride with his legs, and watching his chances. He had a black box of a camera in his hand, and was snapping off photographs as fast as ever he could shift the films, and was swearing like a lighterman because he had not been

ready to catch the berg at the exact moment when she was calved.

'My man,' I said, when the boat had steadied down a bit, and we could get a chance to bail her, 'you ought to have been at your prayers just now.'

'So unoriginal. Besides, I am no believer in sudden deathbed repentance. Besides, again, we didn't get drowned. I'd give a finger if the weather had only been clear. As it was, the air was so full of fog and water-mist that I'm afraid the pictures will be very poor when I come to develop them. However, I must get down my sketches and notes whilst they are fresh.' With which he pulled out his drawing-book and got to work.

Now I had seen this glacier calve, and it was a sufficiently tremendous sight for me not to forget it in a hurry. You have seen for yourselves, by the good description I have given of it above, how accurately it sticks in my recollection. But this Professor Paley seemed to have no confidence in his memory. He wrote and scribbled for dear life. He took measurements with thermometer, aneroid, watch, and pony sextant, and he would have boarded the newly-calved berg itself and have explored the raw glacier foot if only we had let him. But the men at the whale-boat's oars were not having any. They were wet through, and their orders were to put us on the beach the quickest way. They certainly did slip out a hint for a healthy tip, but when they saw that no cash was forthcoming from Paley, they found that

orders had to be obeyed to the letter, and in spite of Paley's language and splutter, straight to the beach they went.

Out we got through the surf, our bits of baggage were trundled after us, and away went the boat. There were the pair of us left on as lonely a bit of beach as you'll want to see, with only ice and rocks to furnish it, and snow beginning to fall. It wasn't the flakey snow either that builds drifts. It was that fine drizzle snow that goes through your clothes like so much mist, and means that severe cold is coming. So I make no doubt you think the situation of the pair of us was highly humorous.

But a fat lot my little science chap cared. He rubbed at his nose and he beat at his fingers to keep going, and away he went at his scribble and his sketching as though dear life depended on it. I put it to him that the nearest hotel was some distance away and we had better be trudging.

'Go to it,' he said, 'if you're in a hurry to find your comforts.' And then in his most school-mastery voice : 'My man, I'm engaged on most important matters, and do not desire further interruption.'

As I have said, the situation was highly humorous. The place we were in was achingly desert. There was cold, floe-smothered sea in front, and cold, ice-covered rock behind ; and we had neither kayak nor sledge for transport. It was quite true that Amatikita and his tribe had had both their summer and their winter quarters on Cape Smith some seasons back ; but that was no guarantee

they were there now. In fact, the chances were they had fished and hunted the neighbourhood bare, and had gone elsewhere. If they had gone, when I came to look at the matter in a cold and sober mind, I did not see what alternative we had, except to starve or freeze, whichever suited us best. But my little man would hear no arguments on the point; he merely asked me not to interrupt; so I just wished him the compliments of the season and a frost-bitten nose, and set off on my own.

There was a fine snow driving, as I have said, and the cold was very bitter. I was beyond sight of Paley in twenty yards, and I put on all the pace the ground and my sea-going legs would permit of. It is all very well taking part in a humorous situation, but there are moments when you abominably dislike the idea of being wiped out, especially if you're a man that has to remember you've a poor old mother depending upon you at home. So for a further occupation I spent my time in calling myself all the varieties of idiot I could lay name to for being seduced into such an unprofitable expedition.

Of course you'll say I had enjoyed free quarters on the whaler, and had been treated there as quite the gentleman; but that was not good enough for me; I had got to be earning constantly, or else carry with me the knowledge that mother was suffering through my default. So I there and then notched up a promise to myself that if there was any profit coming out of this trip, or credit that could be turned into cash, I was going to

grip that for my own pocket, if I had to club Paley to get it.

The way was beguiled, then, with these reflections, and in due time I came to the point where Amatikita's winter village had squatted in the old days, and, sure enough, there it was. The houses were unroofed, to be sure, but that was only to be expected. I knew where the summer tents would be pitched, and presently I was inside one of them, and had taken the best place on the raised sleeping bench near the lamp, as a man does if he wants to be respected.

Amatikita himself came in presently, and I shook him by the hand as pleasantly as I would you. (It doesn't do to be too stuck up with Esquimaux, like you are with other natives.) 'You look well, old cock,' I said. 'You've got a fine layer of blubber on you.'

'Bet yo' lifee,' says Amatikita, with a grin that fairly crackled the dirt on his squab nose. 'What for you come back, Cappie? What you want?'

'You come to the point like a man. I've brought a gentleman friend with me this trip, and first thing is, I want him and our traps toted up here before they're frozen solid.'

Amatikita detailed off a party of women and bucks at once. He was very obedient in that way. And I gave them my old fur cap to show Paley as a token, not having a signet ring, which is the proper thing. I wanted Paley to understand I was a considerable man up here amongst the Innuits, and I wanted him to start giving me due

respect without further delay. Then I made one of the women trim up the lamp to make it give more heat, for that's a thing no white man can do for himself without causing it to smoke, and then I told Amatikita what we had called in at Cape Smith to find. 'You savvy mammoth?' I said. 'Great big plenty hairy beast like elephant, with big curly tusks?'

But Amatikita didn't savvy at all, so I had to start in to explain. Drawing's out of my line. I was thoroughly well grounded in the shops, as I have frequently said, but I am free to confess that I never went through the drawing office, and was a poor hand altogether with a pencil. So perhaps the sketches I made with a finger daubed in soot on the inside skin of the tent were none of the best. Besides I may as well own that at that time I had the haziest notion of what a mammoth was like, and even with an elephant, I couldn't for the life of me remember which way the beggar's legs hinged. It's all very well for you to sneer, but try it for yourself, and then you'll know.

However, I made a shot. If the original piece of skin had come out of an ankoot's conjuring sack, it was quite possible that the local practitioner might be able to match it.

'Amatikita,' I said, 'you're a blamed idiot, and there's no hammering the simplest thing into you. A man who can't understand that when you say mammoth you mean mammoth and nothing else, isn't fit to hold a responsible position like you do. Trot out your ankoot, and let's see if a clerical education is equal to the emergency.'

Amatikita winked and scratched himself. 'Me ankoot,' said he.

'The deuce you are. What's become of the last man?'

It seemed that the late sorcerer had been requested to mend by his witchcraft the hammer-spring of a Henry rifle, and not a single spell in his possession would do the trick, although he tried for days. As a consequence he was sacked out of the village, and Amatikita took on the job.

'Why, you're no conjurer,' I said.

'Heap better than last man. I speakee English,' said Amatikita, and then reeled out a spell of whaler's language to prove that he did.

'If it comes to that, I'm a better man at conjuring than either of you. I can mend that gun lock equal to the best smith in Birmingham.'

Amatikita fished up a rusted old Henry rifle from under a heap of furs and rubbish. 'Mend it,' said he. 'Then you shall be ankoot.'

'Not so quick. I've got to see yet whether it suits me to take on this clerical job. Let's look at your stock in trade in the conjuring sack.'

The bag was brought by one of the Mrs. Amatikitas, who were really very attentive. It was one of those bags of elaborately worked skins that are turned out in such large quantity now for the whalers to bring home for the curiosity dealers. Inside was the usual clutter of high-scented rubbish that I had seen so many times before, and viewed with such slender interest. However, I overhauled it now with an attentive eye, and, by whiskers! I came across no fewer than

three bits of the stuff that Paley said was mammoth's hide.

Well, I kept cool. I said I could do some pretty useful conjuring with this stuff if I could find more of it, and asked Amatikita where was his quarry. He gave me to understand that they picked up the skin now and again on the glacier, and offered it as his idea that it had been dragged there by foxes. This was all he had to tell.

By this time Paley and our truck had been fetched up, and Paley was in one of the other tents being thawed out. I laughed when I thought of the little man's modesty. But they brought me word that he was pretty nearly frozen solid when they came up to him, so there was no help for it but to let him be handled in the usual fashion. Besides, I was not sorry to have him kept out of the way for a little longer. I sent for one of the cases we had brought, and knocked off the lid.

'Now,' I said to Amatikita, 'this is margarine, and I've got six other cases of the same material with me. It's one of the most highly prized of European luxuries, and it's only used in the best society. Sniff at it.'

Amatikita sniffed appreciatively, and smacked his fat lips. 'Plenty good smell,' said he. 'You give me some?'

'Just a handful, so that you may get used to the taste and want more.'

He took a good liberal sample, and ate it with fine relish, and then let the squaws lick what was left off his fingers, being a very domesticated man, and kind after the Esquimaux fashion.

I watched him with an attentive eye, and he saw me doing it.

'That's all you get for the present, 'old cock,' I said, nodding at him, 'and so it's no use your starting to beg. If you want any more you must purchase it on terms. Those mammoths that I have been telling you about have teeth, or tusks, if you like the word better. Now, find out where they are to be got, and dig them up, and I'll give you one pound of margarine for every full-grown tusk you bring to me, and I'll mend you that lock-spring on the Henry for nothing.'

He shook hands with me at once upon that. He had quite the English way with him, and offered me none of that nasty nose-rubbing which they practise amongst themselves. He didn't waste any time about thinking whether it would fit in with his other engagements either. He just turned out the whole tribe, men and women, and sent them on the search. He meant having that margarine if it could be earned. He was just mad for it, as I knew he would be.

For myself, I lit a pipe, and buttoned up, and went over into the tent where Paley was, and passed the time of day with him. His frost-bites, now that they were thawed out, were making him sit up, and his temper was none of the best. It seemed to be dawning upon him that I was bossing the show, and the idea in no degree suited his fancy. We sat there on the raised sleeping bench of that stinking tent, with the lamp between our toes, and when at last he shook his fist at me, I laughed openly and

let him have my ideas on the situation without any unnecessary clothes on.

'I quite know,' I admitted, 'that you bought the margarine from the whaler's stores, and that the skipper piled on the price. It was me that suggested your buying it.'

'I made the purchase of the butter on my own initiative, Mr. McTodd. I realised what a large amount of fatty matter one's system requires in the Arctic, and saw that I had underestimated my store.'

'Have your own way of it. Main thing is, you bought the cases as I intended, and here they are, and they'll be employed as I choose.'

'Do you openly state your intention to rob me, you ruffian?'

I tapped my nose at him. He was too small to fight, and as I felt it due to my own self-respect to annoy him in some way, I just tapped my nose. It's a humorous way I've got. 'We'll call those margarine cases my wages. It hangs in my mind that I didn't come here of my own free will. You as good as Shanghaied me, you small swab, and that, let me tell you, is a very serious offence to a man of my temper. At the same time, I may tell you I'm using the stuff to play your own game with.'

'How do you mean?'

'Why, to find mammoths with. I've got on the traces of them already. Look, here are enough pieces of hide to make you a pair of breeches if you clout them neatly together.'

His eyes fairly snapped as he took them over. 'Mr. McTodd,' he said, 'I fear I have been using

some very ungenerous expressions towards you. You are a wonderful man !

‘Oh, I’m all that, and what’s best, Amatikita thinks so as well as yourself. The great thing is, neither Amatikita nor I work without pay, and if I don’t give the word, those bits of wool are all the mammoth you’ll see.’

He took my meaning at once. ‘Mr. McTodd,’ he said eagerly, ‘if any ivory that may be found will please you, I resign all my claim to it.’

I winked and quoted Shakespeare to him. ‘Such is my desire,’ I said. ‘You may have all the meat that’s turned up, if the flavour tickles you, likewise all the hair and wool.’

‘And the bones ? You will lay no claim to the bones ?’

‘You may take the whole graveyard of them, barring the teeth. And now, if you please, we’ll have this agreement down on paper, in case of accidents.’ Which we did, and I sucked off a charter-party stamp from an old contract note, and we signed our names across that to make all secure.

It was as well that I did this, for as the days went on and grew into weeks, he began to cut up pretty awkward. He didn’t dare go outside much, because the cold of the open played the very whiskers with his frost-bites, and even inside the tent he spent most of the time snuggled up in his sleeping-sack, and was most extravagant in his demands for blubber for the lamp. And every day he saw me he clamoured for a ration of that

margarine—or butter as he would persist in calling it. You've no idea how the need for grease of this description grips one in the Arctic. At home I've been blamed, as you know, for the whisky-craving, and it's a thing at times impossible to resist. But this longing for something rich and fat up in the North beats it hollow.

For myself, from long custom I fell in with the Innuït custom, and took my daily whack of raw seal blubber, which, when fresh, has a taste very like walnuts. But Paley said that eating raw blubber was beastly, and would have none of it, and so he had to suffer those horrid pangs that you and I know so well when we want whisky and are not allowed to have it.

At the same time, too, I must say also that I led the Esquimaux life much as the natives did themselves. Indeed, if it had not been for me, the mammoths would never have been found at all, and Amatikita and the other bucks would have been content to go on with the usual routine, gorge and sleep when they had food, and hunt when the larder gaped. But I kept them on the trot amongst the crevasses of Smith's glacier, and for a reward let each man who found a bit of mammoth hide just stick his finger once into a margarine box, and then lick it clean. You've no idea what a whet those little snacks gave them for more.

But at last, by tracing the direction in which the pieces of skin and hair had been dragged, we were led up to a sort of valley at the further side of the glacier, and there with our eyes saw a fox, with

meat in his mouth, bolt out of a cave that led in right underneath the ice.

We were not there yet, by any means. It took us twenty-four hours climbing to get down over those splintered cliffs of ice, and even when we did arrive, the hole was small and had to be dug at. But inside it enlarged. A bit of a river ran here under the foot of the glacier, and had scooped for itself a passage.

Paley, who was so scientific, said afterwards, when I told him about it, that there ought to have been no river there for a score of reasons, and very likely he was right, but there the river was, and it was that which had made the cave which gave us an entrance. Our noses told us what was near. You know the smell frozen meat has ; there's no mistaking it.

There was only one mammoth carcase there, and it had been considerably bashed about by the glacier, and much torn by the foxes. It was quite fresh, of course, and Amatikita and his friends gorged at it till they could hardly toddle. I tried the meat myself, but found it tough, and not a diet you would use much of when you could get good seal steak. Besides, it carried no fat.

However, it was not a restaurant we were looking for, and besides the squeaking of the ice above our heads was more than scaring. There was a sort of sludgy peat stuff underfoot, and I started prodding in this with a seal lance, and presently lit upon a tusk. It took a good deal of quarrying before I got it out, but I guessed its weight at all

a hundred pounds when it was clear, and carried it out to daylight feeling pretty content.

The Innuits were none too keen to stay long in the cave, because they said the squeakings of the ice were the voices of devils ; but I pointed out to Amatikita that, according to the best and latest theological opinions, devils never lived in a climate that was in any degree Arctic, and Amatikita (who by this time was a bit of an Anglomaniac) caught on to the idea at once. Besides, as soon as they had seen me uproot one of those big, fat, semi-circular tusks, they were crazy to get others, and earn their whack of the margarine.

Now once I saw them well at work, it seemed to me only fair that Paley should have his look-in, and so, with considerable pains, I made my way back to the tents. Of course he was coiled up like a snail in his sleeping-sack, and one of the Mrs. Amatikitas, with her hair pulled back so tight that the front of her head was bald, was firing up the lamp for him. By the smart shaving-brush that woman had got her back hair done up into, I saw she was struck with him, and whilst we had been away, I'll not say he hadn't smiled at her in return. But once I came in with my news he gave her the cold shoulder entirely. He'd no ear for anything else.

'Why do you come back here, McTodd?' he cried, 'you should have stayed and got that carcass out entire for me. You must know how much it means to me.'

'Fair dos. Fossil ivory's what I'm after, and that's being seen to. Mammoth meat and red-

haired pelt don't amuse me in the least. I've strained a point to come and tell you about it, but that's sheer kindness on my part, and you should make the most of it.'

'My good man, you're in my employ. You'd better remember that.'

'My good mannikin, there's a certain agreement in my pocket with your name to it, signed across a stamp. You'd better remember that.'

I think he'd forgotten this, for presently he got more civil (so far as his schoolmastery way would let him) and began to get pleading. 'This is a find of enormous value. No mammoth has ever been discovered in Greenland before. Have you no thought for science, Mr. McTodd?'

'Not a ha'p'orth.'

'Is there nothing I can do to persuade you to get out that carcase for me?'

'Well, I don't see what's wrong with your turning out into the cold and getting it yourself.'

I saw him writhe inside the sleeping-bag. 'I should die if I tried it. Climbing over that terrible glacier would kill me.'

But I was not going to be softened. I said he should have thought out all this before, and arranged to pay a substitute honestly if he couldn't do the work himself, and, finally, the best I would do was to take his camera and flashlight apparatus back with me, and snap off some photographs. It was the flashlight apparatus which attracted me. An ankoot is always expected to show off some miracles.

Well, as we say in the classics, to the victors

are the spoils. I got seventeen fine mammoths' teeth; Paley got the photos I took for him, and some scraps of red fur and bristles; Amatikita and his friends got bilious on the margarine, besides having the hammer-spring of the Henry mended; and the skipper of the whaler which picked us up and took us home to Scotland, squeezed a freight out of us which must have surprised even his impudence. Also, mother got well fixed up for life. I sold the ivory for £1207, and settled the whole money upon her, and in Ballindrochater, which is no' exactly Edinboro' for size and expense, ye'll understand that means a very genteel income.

But Paley was the big surprise. One day in the papers I saw he'd been given a title "for valuable scientific discovery." He was Sir Benjamin Paley, F.O.S., or F.S.S., I think it was, but anyway F-something, and he seemed to be no end of a big pot. And presently, by a poster, I saw him announced to give a lecture illustrated by specimens of mammoth remains, and lantern slides, on 'The Finding of the Greenland Mammoth.' Well, I went.

That lecture made me laugh. I'll not deny I'd refreshed a little first, and perhaps I laughed a trifle more heartily than was needful. I've a fine sense of humour in me at times. But to hear this Sir Benjamin Paley gassing about what *he'd* seen, and *he'd* done, and *he'd* photographed, and *he'd* quarried, was enough to make a glacier shake till it calved. My whiskers! but I wish I'd had Amatikita there beside me. He'd have laughed till he split.

There was never one word about Mr. Neil

Angus McTodd, who was, after all, the real discoverer and the real photographer. It was all Paley—*my* deduction, *my* expedition, *my* tact, *my* hardihood, *my* cleverness, *my* good fortune, and the audience, who seemed for the most part fools, and not people you often meet anywhere else, took him at his own valuation and cheered most decorously.

Now, thinks I to myself, this is all very fine, but credit where credit is due. The British public is here being educated, and it's being educated all wrong. It is being taught that Paley, an Englishman, is a hero, whilst in reality it is a Scot of the name of McTodd who did these deeds. So I got to my feet, and waved for silence, and in a few well-chosen words endeavoured to point out where the error had crept in.

But they were indeed a curious audience. It wasn't that I used any bad language. I merely spoke with sarcasm and humour, but they were too dull to see any of it. They got noisy, and when I refused to sit down, and cleared a space round me, they got more noisy still. They threw me out at last, of course, but it took eight of them to do it, and I left considerable wreckage behind amongst the furniture.

Still they did not dare to prosecute. I only wish they had tried it on. It would have suited me fine to have found an opportunity of telling the truth in public, and, as you know quite well, I can rise to real eloquence at times in a police court. Yes, by whiskers! there's many a stipendiary can bear evidence to that.

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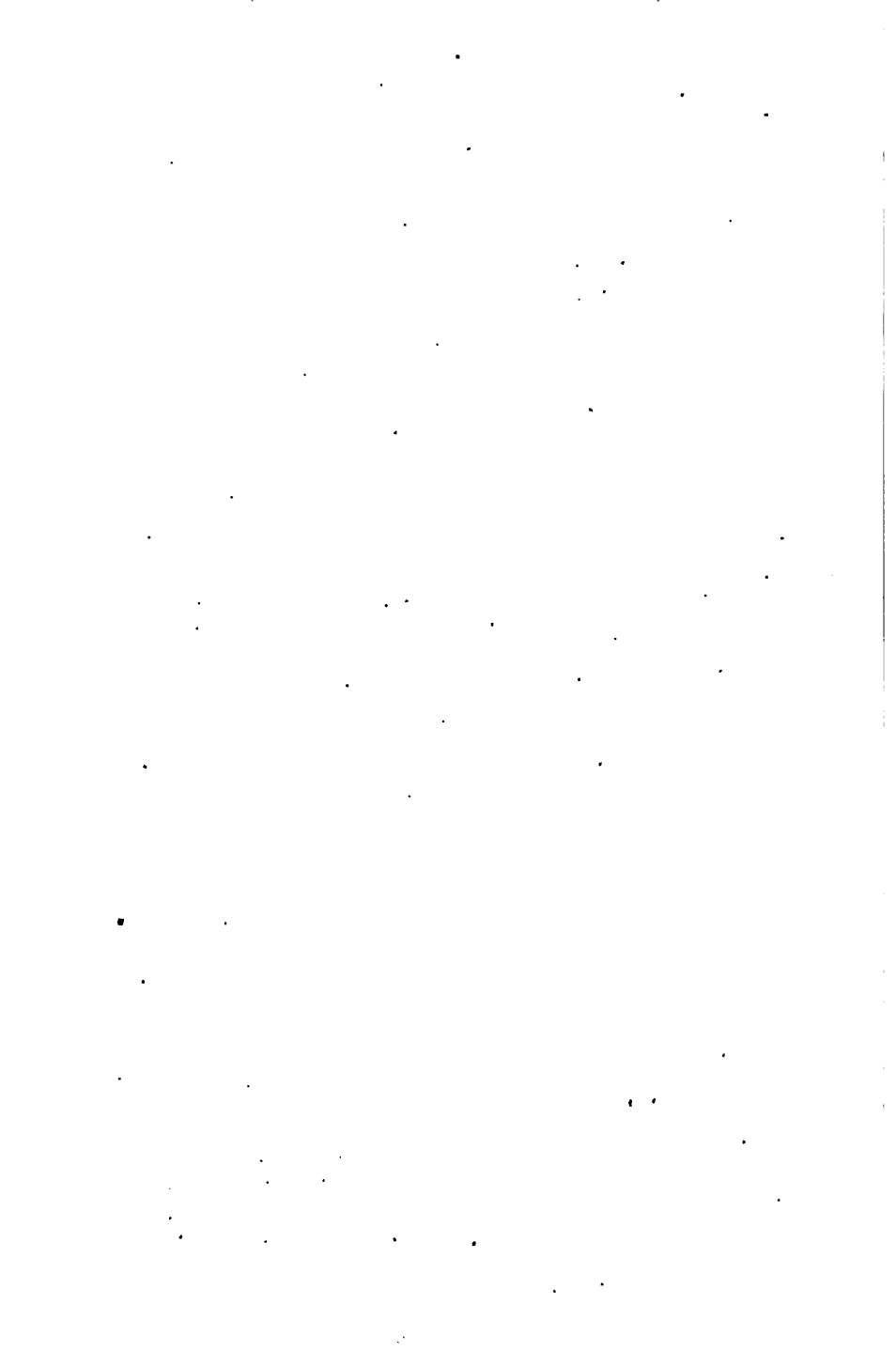
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